Interview with Claude G. Ross

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR CLAUDE G. ROSS

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Q: Ambassador Ross, welcome. I'm glad to have you here. I wonder if you would start out by telling me how your interest was first stimulated in the foreign affairs field, and how you came to be in the Foreign Service.

ROSS: The short answer to that is that I became aware of the Foreign Service at the age of 15, and from that point on, I never really seriously considered any other career. To explain, I should say that there were probably three factors that attracted me to the Foreign Service and then sustained me in preparing myself for the examinations.

From earliest childhood, I had been fascinated by pictures of foreign lands and exotic peoples. I remember that geography was my favorite subject in grammar school.

Q: Where was this?

ROSS: This was in Southern California. As a seven-year-old, and eight-year-old, I was fond of drawing maps. For some reason, Iceland and Greenland fascinated me, and I don't know how many reproductions of those places I made. Another bit of memory was my fascination with the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers and their confluence, and the delta going into the Persian Gulf.Also at an early age, I became interested in stamp collecting. I

remember that the stamps of the British and French colonies were my favorites, probably because they had very colorful representations of those areas. One I remember in particular was one from the French Equatorial Africa, which showed a crouching leopard, and the stamp was surcharged Ubangi-Shari. I didn't know at that point that some years later I was going to be in the Central African Republic, which had earlier been known as Ubangi-Shari.

I was interested in languages also from an early age. I heard Spanish, of course, in the streets, and picked up some with my friends. My grandmother taught me some German. So all of these factors worked when my last semester of my high school, I took a class in international relations. That's where I heard about the Foreign Service. From that point on, my attention was focused.

So when I went to the University of Southern California, I majored in international relations and political science and minored in languages. I was fortunate. I had hoped to go to an Ivy League school, but my father's illness and the fact that we were pretty well wiped out in the Crash in 1929 meant that I had to stay in Southern California. I got a scholarship to USC and did my preparation there. I was fortunate in that, because it was one of the few schools in the United States at that time that had a School of International Relations. It was headed by an ex-Foreign Service officer, Claude A. Buss, who had been a Chinese-language officer, but who retired from the Foreign Service in 1934, because he found he couldn't support his family on the salary then being offered.

Q: It was interesting that you had the same first name.

ROSS: Yes. He was an interesting man, and I must say he was one of the people who really supported me in my preparation.

Another factor that I might mention was that, as we were wiped out by the Depression, when I thought about a career, it was in terms of something that offered security. I had to work part of the time going through university and had some exposure to the business

world. As a matter of fact, I worked as a kind of personal secretary to the head of an outfitting company in Los Angeles, and so I had a close look at the workings of his rather large company. Parenthetically, I might say that one of the things I did for this gentleman was to write letters to the Department of State to arrange for the immigration of his Polish relatives from Warsaw into the United States in the years immediately preceding the Second World War, when the Nazi persecution of Jews had already begun.

A third factor was that I was not all that interested in business. My family had instilled in me the idea of taking a career that would offer a chance to serve, something that had real work satisfaction in it. So these things converged.

I went to the USC, as I say. It was a fortunate choice. Several of my professors were foreign nationals. One was an Italian, one was an Argentine.

Q: Did you get any kind of travel abroad?

ROSS: No, I did not. At the end of my sophomore year, I attended a summer meeting of the America-Japan Student Conference at Stanford University. This was the fourth such conference. The fifth conference was held in Japan, at Tokyo Imperial University, in 1938. I had expected to go to that, but my father took a turn for the worst about that point, and I stayed home. So I never did go abroad. Until I went into the Foreign Service, my only excursions out of the United States were in Northern Mexico.I graduated from the University of Southern California in 1939, and that September I took the written exams for the Foreign Service in San Francisco, in the basement of the old Federal Building there, in September. It was while Warsaw was being bombed. In San Francisco, the temperature, oddly enough, was 95. There was no air-conditioning. It was rather an ordeal for the three and a half days that the written examination lasted.

I passed the writtens, and was called back to Washington for oral examinations in January of 1940. I sat before a board composed of about five high-ranking officers. One was Assistant Secretary Berle. I think G. Howland Shaw, who was head of personnel, a

Foreign Service officer, was on the board. Mr. Joe Green was on the board. Somebody from the Civil Service Commission was on the board. The fifth one, I don't remember.

The examination lasted about an hour, more or less. I was able to divert the conversation to the Near East, which was the area in which I had specialized at the university, so it went off reasonably well. I was able to pass the oral part of the examination with a grade of 95, which helped me considerably in my posting.

I then took the oral examinations in languages. The only people who were given oral exams in languages were those who had passed the rest of the orals. I took those in French, Spanish, and German, and found, to my astonishment, when I eventually got the grades, that I was given the grade of 100.

Q: In all three of them? That is quite fantastic!

ROSS: But there was a sequel to this, which was not so pleasant. I took the exams in January of '40. In February of '40, about five weeks later, in California, when I was back at graduate work, I got a letter from the Department saying that I had failed to pass the physical examination because of a rapid heartbeat. They said that, therefore, they could not certify me for a list of people eligible for commissioning, but they did give me a second chance. Within four months I took a second exam and passed it, so I could be certified.

I immediately left school and concentrated on building up. I was underweight, too, but that was not a real factor. I concentrated on trying to bring about a physical condition that would permit me to pass the examination. I took that exam at the end of March 1940, I think it was, in Los Angeles. In April I got another message from the Department saying that I had passed the physical and was now certified.

That wasn't really as crushing as it might have been. I did miss going out with the first group, which I would have gone along with otherwise. But that had its positive effect, because if I had done that, I would have been posted to Europe and would not have

married, because my wife was a year behind me and had not yet graduated. So I was not called for appointment until July. In the meantime, she graduated.

In June I had gotten a letter saying that they were calling some of us back to Washington, if we were so disposed to come back and work as clerks in the Visa Division while awaiting appointment. I agreed to do that. So I came back to Washington, and on June 18, 1940, the day that De Gaulle issued his call to the Free French, I was sworn into the Foreign Service as a junior clerk, class three, at the annual salary of $1,200 a year.

Q: I suppose you had to come back to Washington at your own expense?

ROSS: I think so. That's a point I don't really remember, but I believe so, yes.

I worked in the Visa Division until July 23, I think it was. In the meantime, I was commissioned as a Foreign Service officer and was assigned to my first post.

I went back to Los Angeles, married, and nine days later we left for Mexico City. In that group, I think there were about 12 of us who were assigned in July. Ten of them went to Canadian posts, I went to Mexico City, and another officer went to Havana.

Q: In those days, you took your orientation course after your first post.

ROSS: That's right. We went out completely cold. In my case, I had a little work in the Visa Division, drafting replies to messages in from the field, so I knew a little bit about the mechanics of the thing. But otherwise, nothing.

We arrived in Mexico City on the 15th of August 1940, in the late morning. In the afternoon, I was at work in the Consulate General, working on visas and interviewing in French, Spanish, and German.

Mexico City at that time was an absolutely fascinating place, because there were all kinds of refugees coming through there from Europe, some hoping to make their homes in

Mexico, but a great many of them hoping to come to the United States. So they would present themselves as applicants either for immigration visas or visitor's visas, as the case might be. We were really overworked. We were overwhelmed by the numbers.

Q: As visa officers all over the world.

ROSS: Yes, yes. But I think we were one of the first ones to be, and the Canadian posts, as well, because of the particular situation. It was fascinating work, I must say. It was the only time in the field that I really did intensive visa work. As you know, you have a certain satisfaction there. You can see the results of your labors, which is not always the case.

Q: You also, I think, learn a lot about humanity, which you might not learn otherwise.

ROSS: That's right, which, of course, is useful to have acquired at an early stage in a Foreign Service career, when you're dealing with people from then on. In the course of this six months that I spent on visa work in the Consulate General, I met some very interesting people. I gave an immigration visa to Arthur Rubinstein, who was a fascinating man, delightful. He was also playing a series of concerts in Mexico City. I remember, at one point after he'd gotten his immigration visa, he sent Andrea and me a couple of tickets to one of his concerts. We were right there in the first row, and he waved to us. It was really something for a 23-year-old.

Q: Were you able to keep up with him after that?

ROSS: No, unfortunately. At DACOR Bacon House, I see his photograph.

Another man was Sir Thomas Beecham, to whom I gave a visa, and the other concert pianist, Alexander Brailowski. It seems to me I also interviewed Diego Rivera. I never gave him a visa. That visa was not forthcoming for obvious reasons, but I met him. So it was, as I say, a fascinating experience.

Then in six months I went into citizenship work there—passports, protection, notarials, all that type of thing. I spent five months at that. That was also an extremely interesting assignment. It had some less agreeable aspects to it. I remember several cases of having to go and identify bodies and collect remains of Americans who died.

Q: And probably got a few out of jail.

ROSS: And get them out of jail, yes. There were some colorful characters roaming around, colorful Americans, in Mexico City at that time. I remember one guy who had a butterfly net and was chasing all kinds of things all around the city. He ended up in the pokey, and I had to go get him out.

I remember one of the more colorful experiences I had was chasing an American around Mexico City—around Mexico, actually—to serve a subpoena for a federal case in the United States. I had looked several places outside of Mexico City for him. Finally, I discovered that he had returned to Mexico City. On the first of December 1940, which was the day in which the new president of Mexico was inaugurated, and there were great parades up and down the Reforma, I found that he had indeed gone back to the Hotel Reforma, I think it was, right there on the main street. So I threaded my way through the parade lines and went up, knocked on the door. A servant let me into the apartment, and I proceeded to serve the subpoena to Mr. Blumenthal in his bed. (Laughs)

Q: It's fascinating, the kind of experiences you get at the very beginning. You had something in the book about a little economic training.

ROSS: Yes. My last month there, I had about a month of it, and some of it was doing the usual world-trade directory reports, and we were just beginning to get into an interesting part, which was a kind of precursor to the black-listing operation, when I was called back to Washington to go through the Foreign Service Training School.

We reported in to Washington on the second of September 1941, but we did not go to the training school immediately. We spent two months in the Visa Division. There were 23 of us back from the field to do that. They put us in the Visa Division, and we again were busy reviewing cases and drafting correspondence. I found myself in the curious position of answering some of the queries I'd sent in. (Laughs)

Q: Answering your own mail.

ROSS: Right. I got to learn something more about the drafting process in the Department and the system of review of correspondence that they had at that time. You would draft something, you would think it was going to go out right away. Four days later, it would come back with red pencil all over it, and you'd go through the whole exercise again. So speed was not exactly the hallmark of the operation.

Q: You're the first person I've talked to who has mentioned that. I remember it was still going a little bit after the war, although it toned down a lot. So you did eventually get the indoctrination course.

ROSS: The month of November we spent in the Foreign Service Training School. As it turned out, it was the last one of the old schools in the basement of old State. The director of the school was William Burdett, Bill Burdett's father, who later became minister to New Zealand. We had Mr. Burdett and Miss Cornelia Bassell. She was den mother to all of us, really a very gracious lady, from whom we all learned a lot, particularly on the social side of Foreign Service life.

Q: Were the Carrs active then, Wilbur Carr and his wife? Were they still around?

ROSS: No, I think he was in the field at that point.

Q: He was in Czechoslovakia at that point.

ROSS: If he was still in the Service, he was in the field. We had, as I say, a month at this. Most of it was by lecture. We did visit a couple of the other departments of the government. We had lectures on the functional activities of the Foreign Service, on the various areas, for example. We didn't have to do much in the way of writing ourselves. We didn't have examinations, as I recall. But we did get the attention of senior people. Again, Berle came down and lectured to us, and some of the other high-ranking officers of the department. From that standpoint, we got a degree of attention that I think later generations didn't have.Our assignments were all dated December 3. We were called back into the Department on Saturday, December 6, 1941, and given our assignments. I was assigned to Quito, Ecuador. A number of them went to Europe, the Far East, Latin America, one or two to Africa. My wife and I were in the old Cairo Hotel, packing to take off for California on the seventh of December, when we turned the radio on and heard the first news of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. About an hour later, we got a call from the Department of State saying, “Don't go anywhere. Stay where you are.”

For the next three weeks, until about the 20th of December, I and another ten of my colleagues that they were able to catch before we left, all served in the code room of the Department of State, up on one of the top floors of State, doing deciphering, the Gray Code, Brown Code, that old strip cipher that used to cut your fingers. But we did that until finally they let us leave. We went home for Christmas and a little vacation before we took off for our first permanent post at Quito, Ecuador.

I went out as third secretary of legation and vice consul. It was a legation for the first three months that I was there. It was an interesting time. Obviously, we had just gotten in the war ourselves. Ecuador had broken relations with the Axis, but there were still numbers of Germans there. They had been well entrenched. For example, the national airline had been German-operated, and that was taken over by Pan American. But they were in a number of other things, so there was a certain amount of activity at the outset when I first got there, running Nazi agents down, closing down other German business enterprises.

About three weeks after I got there, the minister, Boaz Long, sent me down to the Ecuadorian-Peruvian boundary to take a look at Ecuador's southern province, which had been occupied by Peruvian troops. In late 1941, there had been a kind of guerrilla war that broke out between Ecuador and Peru, a lot of it over in the Oriente and the Amazon side, but some of it in El Oro province, which was the southern province of Ecuador bordering Peru. The Peruvians had come across and had occupied a number of villages on the Ecuadoran side of the border. According to the Rio Treaty in January of 1942, they were supposed to have withdrawn. The minister wanted me to go down and ascertain that fact, along with a lieutenant from our neutral observers, and also to see what condition the area was in.

So we went down, took a launch out of Guayaquil, and went up the river to a debarkation point, anchored in the river, I remember, overnight. We slept on top of the deck. It was terribly hot and sticky on the deck. During the night, the boat slipped anchor and swung under trees near the bank. I woke up in the morning and I was just covered with mosquito bites, tremendous. I thought, “God, if I'm ever going to get malaria, it's going to be now.” As it turned out, I didn't get malaria.

We did this trip. There wasn't anything there. We did manage to get some horses, did it all on horseback for several days. We had to carry in our own supplies. Every one of these villages was evacuated, anyway, and everything that could be carried away was carried away. It was complete desolation.

Q: This was all Indian population there, I suppose?

ROSS: Largely. Indian or black, because this was the coast. As I say, I never saw the inhabitants in the place, so I don't really know precisely. I came back, anyway, and made my report. In due course, I know we did make loans to the Ecuadoran Government, made funds available for rehabilitation. We did do rehabilitation work in that area.

I was the third career officer at the post. When I got there, the Commercial Attach# and the Second Secretary were the only two career officers. Ambassador Boaz Long was political. He was a very interesting man. He'd been a commercial traveler in Latin America in the early years of this century, an ardent Democrat. In 1913, he became first minister to El Salvador, then minister to Cuba.

Q: Gracious, that's a long career, wasn't it?

ROSS: I think he left Cuba about 1922, near the beginning of the Republican administration. Then he was out, went back into business until 1934, and then when Roosevelt came in, he went out again, first as minister to Nicaragua, then minister to Ecuador. He became ambassador when we raised it to an embassy in April of 1942. Then when he left Ecuador about a year after I got there, he became ambassador to Guatemala. By that time he was about 70 years old.

The DCM, so called, was the second secretary, an old class six, I guess, and I was there then as kind of dog's body.

Q: You were still unclassified at that time?

ROSS: I was unclassified C when I got there, became B almost immediately. There were auxiliary officers. The commercial attach# had three or four, and there were more eventually. Then there were several American clerk-stenographers, and a non-career vice consul there.

We didn't have an administrative officer per se in those days. I did what administrative duties there were to be done. I was head of the consular section of the legation, then embassy, and eventually had one non-career officer serving under me, who did most of the work. I signed all the passports and sort of double-checked everything, and trained him in the process. I did political work. I was the protocol officer. I was the Ambassador's aide. Long left after I'd been there about a year, and then we got a career officer, Robert

Scotten, as ambassador. He took a liking to me and made me his aide, in the process of which I did a lot of speech writing for him and handled all his personal accounts. I didn't do the embassy accounting, but I handled his personal accounts.

Q: Balanced his checkbook?

ROSS: Yes, balanced the checkbook, made the entries in the checkbook. He was in the fortunate position of having his salary as ambassador matched by his mother, giving an equal amount of money every month. I entered these things into the checkbook. I remember vividly. He, as I say, was a career officer and had a long career all on the diplomatic side. I learned a lot about the Foreign Service, particularly about the representation side and social side, from him and his wife. My wife had a role model in Mrs. Scotten.

Q: Which was extremely important.

ROSS: It was very important. I was at that post, as it turned out, for four years, the last three with the Scottens. It was an interesting time. In the midst of all this, not too long after I got there, in May of '42, we had an earthquake in Guayaquil, that killed one of our vice consuls, Vice Consul Slaughter. You see his name on the plaque in the Department. I was sent down on TDY to cover that position until a replacement could arrive at post. So for something over a month, I did consular work in Guayaquil.

Q: And had your own post?

ROSS: No. There was a Consul General in Guayaquil, so I was one of about four officers, I guess. I was the next to junior, because there was a non-career vice consul there. But it was an interesting assignment. I saw that part of Ecuador, which was hot and tropical and differed greatly from Quito, which is at 9,500 feet. So it was really a useful experience for me.

One of the things I had to do, being the junior career officer in Quito for the whole time I was there, I had to do courier work. The couriers came through Guayaquil. The international runs couldn't fly into Quito. The airport facilities were not there, and you could never fly in at night; there were no lights. So I had to go down and meet the courier and get the pouch. For the first couple of years I was there, I guess, it was insisted that somebody with a diplomatic passport had to make this run to meet the courier. Since there were only a couple of us in the post, and I was the junior one, I think I made about 15 trips, one every couple of weeks. It was a run not without an element of danger, because you went up over 16,000 feet with no oxygen for passengers in those days. The crew had oxygen. My wife, who became pregnant in this period, got very nervous about my having to do this all the time. Finally, I spoke to the Charg# d'affaires, and I was relieved of that duty and they made other arrangements. I was able to get a dispensation.

Q: A little of that sort of thing is fun.

ROSS: Yes, but after about 15 in a row, it gets to be a little tiresome.

Ecuador was an interesting place in those days. We were at war, they had broken with the Axis, and the then-president, Carlos Arroyo del R#o, supported the United States in the war effort. A lot of people in Ecuador did not. But he did remain a good friend of us. In the course of this, he made a lot of enemies, and his governing style also was on the arbitrary side. In May of 1944, there was a revolution. Most of the fighting, which was not all that extensive, which didn't last more than about a day, occurred in Guayaquil or in that area, so we didn't have anything much in Quito. Arroyo del R#o was ousted, and a former president who had served once before for a year before he had been ousted, a man named Jos# Mar#a Velasco Ibarra came back and was president, and brought a new team in, obviously. So we had new people to meet and get to know.

Q: Was there a major German problem later?

ROSS: Not later, no. That was pretty well ended.

Q: How about Japanese?

ROSS: Japanese had been there, but just really with diplomatic representation, a legation. That had been closed. The Italian legation had been closed, and the German legation had been closed. Eventually, this would have been about early 1945, I guess it must have been after V-E Day, the Ecuadoran Government gave us what files that remained of the German legation. So one of the tasks that I had was to read what was left, to see if there was anything in there that was valuable. As it turned out, there wasn't very much. They had gone through and taken care of that. But nevertheless, I had to read the whole thing and then send in a somewhat lengthy dispatch to the Department of the results of my endeavors.

Another thing that I was able to do there, after the revolution there was a new constitution in Ecuador, which I had to translate and send in a translation to the Department with a commentary. That was an interesting exercise.

Q: You went to Athens next.

ROSS: Right. This was the only time that I got a post that I asked for.

Q: You're one up on me; I never got one.

ROSS: This was the only time. Ambassador Scotten was going to the United States, and I'd been there now close on to four years. By this time, V-J Day had come and gone, and he knew I would be leaving at some point. He asked me what I would like to do, so I gave him a list of three posts—Athens, Madrid, and Vienna, in that order. He got to Washington, and shortly afterwards, I got a message from him saying, “Sorry, couldn't get you Athens. You're going to Madrid.” Well, that was all right. I certainly couldn't complain.

About two weeks later, while he was still in Washington, he sent me another message: “You've got Athens.” So in November of 1945, I got orders to go to Athens. As it turned out, I didn't leave Quito until February of 1946, because my replacement, who was coming from Lisbon, Halleck Rose, never received his orders. It wasn't until January that this omission was discovered. Finally, they cranked it all up, and I left Quito in February 1946, my wife, meanwhile, having gone back to Los Angeles in December of '45 with our two-year-old son.

Q: She had the child in Quito?

ROSS: She did. I might say, parenthetically, we nearly lost her there. The birth itself was easy, but she went into shock and bled some hours after. I had to go tearing around town in the dead of night to get the doctor. Fortunately, I got him. He told me later that if I'd been about five minutes later getting back to the house . . .

Q: We had just gotten you to Athens from Quito.

ROSS: I'd been in Los Angeles, taking leave, then went to Washington briefly for a little period of indoctrination. I worked on the desk for about a week or two, in the course of which I met my Ambassador, Lincoln MacVeagh. He said, “You're going to be a political officer. I'm delighted to have you.” So he had me primed for that.

We went to Athens by ship, the first time in my life I'd ever traveled by ship. However, it was not exactly a luxury liner. We went out in a decommissioned naval transport. I don't think they had done anything to decommission it, except to take the guns out of the gun tubs. The crew was still the same, and all announcements to passengers were made on a “Now hear this” basis.

Q: This was a U.S. ship?

ROSS: Yes, this was called the SS Marine Shark. It had been a troop transport. I don't know how many passengers it carried, but the accommodations, such as they were, seemed to be full. There were maybe three or four two-person cabins. There was a number of six-person cabins, with three bunks on either side of the room. Then there were large dormitory arrangements. As I say, they had done nothing, really, to convert this to civilian use. My wife shared one of these with five other ladies, one of the six-berth rooms. I shared one with five children, five boys below the age of ten, including my own son.

Q: Nice and restful.

ROSS: So I had from the second of May until the sixteenth of May in these conditions. There were about 15 or 16 deck chairs. I think I counted them once. They had been appropriated by the first people aboard. We were not among them. We couldn't use the one kind of recreation area—a saloon—aboard the ship, because the ship was deporting somebody back to Italy for white slavery and drugs.

Q: A Mafia type.

ROSS: Yes. He and a couple of his cohorts were in there, so that was out. You had to sit on the hatches or maybe up in the gun tubs.

Q: This was what year?

ROSS: This was the month of May. It was all right. From that standpoint, there was no problem. But I remember vividly there were three sittings at meals, and if you were on the second or third, you didn't have to have a menu to know what dinner had consisted of, because it was all over the tablecloth. These naval types who were serving were smoking cigarettes with ashes this long on the cigarette dropping into the food. It was a colorful crossing.

We got there, and I called on the Charg# d'affaires. The Ambassador was still in the States. He said, “Mr. Ross, we're happy to see you. We're particularly happy. You know, yesterday we fired the administrative officer. We would appreciate it very much if you'd take over the job until we can get a new man out here in maybe two months.” I said, “Of course.” What could I say? Well, I was administrative officer for my first year there.

This was a year in which the post more than doubled, because, as you will recall, I got there in May of '46, and in September of '46, just after the plebiscite for the return of the King, the communist rebellion began, the Andartes, as they were called, came down out of the hills. So the civil war was under way.The British, who had been the power that was shoring up the Greek Government at that point, were finding it financially impossible to continue the burden. We took over with aid to Greece and Turkey, and the Truman Doctrine. So from about March of '47, we took over part of the burden that the British had had. That meant a tremendous augmentation of staff. When I entered the job as administrative officer, I had half-time services of a secretary, two code clerks, one disbursing officer, who had an American clerk working under him. That was it as far as American staff was concerned. I was the next to junior career officer on the staff. So it was a real challenge to administer the post.

I had, as it turned out, a very useful professional experience. I learned all kinds of things. I became a certifying officer almost at the very beginning, but then I was signing my name, certifying accounts in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. It really puts iron in your soul.

Q: You probably picked up some Greek, too, didn't you?

ROSS: I should have mentioned this perhaps earlier. I began learning Greek the week after I met my wife. That was before I took the written exams for the Foreign Service. So I had a fair amount when I got there.

Along about April of '47, shortly after the Truman Doctrine was inaugurated, we began getting the advance people for the aid mission and the buildup of Embassy staff. We were inspected by H. Merle Cochran. I have been inspected by him twice. I was inspected by him in Ecuador, and then I was inspected by him in Athens. His coming was heralded a month or two before hand by tales out of posts that he was inspecting en route to Athens—horror stories about sacking this officer and that, including my counterpart in one Embassy. (Laughs) So we were braced for this. He came, he did his inspection. As I say, I'd been inspected before, so that, I suppose, was a bit of a help.

One thing happened while he was there which really struck me. Near the end of the inspection, he sat down one day and composed a telegram to the Department on our staffing problems, because we were really being run ragged. Three days later, we got a message from the Department, assigning six officers and five clerks. These were Class 2 and 3 officers, and my replacement as an administrative officer, who happened to be a staff officer, but a staff officer of Class 1 or 2, a retired lieutenant colonel. Then for the secretaries, what they had done was to go around and pull one out of five different European offices.

Q: So you really got some attention.

ROSS: Yes. That telegram assigned Harold Minor to be political counselor, Horace Smith to be number two on the economic side, a senior Class 3 officer to be head of the consular section, poor Tom Watson, who was later killed in Jerusalem, to be number two in the political section. It was a high-powered group of officers.

Shortly after that, this administrative type arrived. I relinquished my duties and became a political officer and aide to the Ambassador. I had already been protocol officer from the time I arrived at the post, so I was used to a lot of correspondence with the Foreign Office on protocol matters and all kinds of things. I also was liaison with the Palace, which was

very interesting. That became more and more interesting as we began to get visitors from the outside, who obviously wanted to see the King and Queen.

I was aide to the Ambassador, and this was a trying time for Ambassador MacVeagh, because with the advent of the aid mission, the lines of authority got very blurred. So there was a conflict that developed between him and the aid director, ex-Governor Griswold. This went back and forth and back and forth, and eventually, the Department sort of knuckled under, and Ambassador MacVeagh lost the contest.

While all of this was going on, his wife was dying of cancer at the post, and it was a very difficult time for him. About a month and a half before she died, he moved me into his office. I had my desk in his large ambassadorial office.

Q: He wanted somebody there.

ROSS: Some support. So that's what I did. I spent a lot of time at the residence and actually was in the residence talking to him, when the doctor came out of the bedroom and told him his wife had just died. It was a very moving thing.

Q: It was a close relationship.

ROSS: It was.

Q: Do you have any comments on MacVeagh's style and qualities?

ROSS: From my standpoint, he was an excellent Ambassador. He had been a classmate of Roosevelt's at Harvard, and had been appointed as Minister to Greece in 1933, was there until '41, when we came out and the Germans moved in. Roosevelt then sent him as Minister to Iceland in '42, then Minister in South Africa in '43, when the Greek royal family was in South Africa, then in '44, up to Cairo to be Ambassador near the government of Greece and the government of Yugoslavia in Cairo, and eventually just to the government

of Greece. Then about four or five days after the Germans evacuated Athens, he moved back to Athens as Ambassador to Greece.

He was a classical scholar. He didn't speak modern Greek, but he knew ancient Greek and loved the country, of course. The Greeks all knew him well and loved him. He was a gentleman of the old school in every way. A marvelous drafter. He wrote really brilliant dispatches. I learned more about writing dispatches from the time I spent with him then from any other experience.

Q: "Having the honor to"?

ROSS: Yes, the old form. "I have the honor to" and "respectfully yours." But his were really very, very good.

In those days, I think airgrams were introduced while I was in Greece, but everything else had been done by dispatch and telegram. We used telegrams rather sparingly.

Q: Because you had to encode them yourselves.

ROSS: And you couldn't just dash them off. MacVeagh was a real influence on my development, for which I was immensely grateful. He then went to be Ambassador to Portugal until '52. Then in the beginning of '52, he became Ambassador to Spain, and it was under his time in Spain that the first base agreement was signed.

Q: Then he left shortly after Eisenhower came in. He had a long career.

ROSS: Yes. He had 20 years as chief of mission. When he came through to Washington in 1952, if I may jump ahead for a moment, I was there. I had just come in from the field, not from Athens, but from another post. He asked me if I would go to Madrid with him, and I was greatly tempted, but I couldn't. Under the old system, you had to spend at least three

years of your first 15 in Washington. It was a regulation which was observed very carefully in those days. So I couldn't go. I was greatly disappointed.

After MacVeagh left, Ambassador Grady came in.

Q: Who also had trouble with the aid mission chief.

ROSS: Yes, but he, I guess, perhaps was a little more adept at bureaucratic in-fighting. He'd been an assistant secretary and been an ambassador in India.

Q: Did that change your function?

ROSS: No. I continued as political officer, protocol officer, as liaison, and, to a certain extent, as aide to the Ambassador, but was never in the same close relationship I'd had with MacVeagh. But I worked closely with Mrs. Grady, who was a rather flamboyant Californian of Spanish descent, from a prominent Spanish family. So I had a lot of work to do with the Palace, arranging all kinds of functions.

I remember, for example, that in 1948, when [Louis] Mountbatten came out through the Mediterranean to go back to London, he came to Athens. Then there was a three-way tug-of-war about who was going to entertain him and how, because the Palace obviously wanted him, the British Embassy wanted him, of course, and the American Ambassador and his wife, who had been in India, knew the Mountbattens. So I got involved in trying to work out all these arrangements. We finally ended up giving a big reception for him. I remember standing behind the Gradys in the receiving line, telling them who was coming, so they could come out with the names when shaking hands as though they knew all along.

Q: An invaluable function.

ROSS: It worked very well. I remember at one point, my wife was standing behind Mrs. Grady, who had Mountbatten, of course, next to her, and all of these dowagers were being

presented to Mountbatten. He turned around and said to Mrs. Grady—my wife, of course, heard this—"Bring me some cuties!" (Laughs) Which, of course, we did.

As political officer, I had a fascinating time with the civil war going on. We weren't able to do a great deal of traveling around because of the conditions. We were very careful about exposing staff members to possible violence. There was a real danger. I remember the Minister of Justice was assassinated right on a street corner in Athens by guerrillas. But we could make excursions to the outskirts of Athens, the suburbs.

Our second and third years there, we lived in Psychiko, which was a few miles outside of Athens, and you could hear firing at night from beyond there so we weren't able to do that much traveling. A lot of the Peloponnesus was off limits to us.

Q: That was pretty well the condition 20 years later.

ROSS: We were able to get down as far as Corinth and and Mycenae. The islands were all right. I had one very interesting trip in May of '48 to eastern Macedonia and Thrace, flying up to Salonika, then joining Consul General Raleigh Gibson and Gerry Drew, then the deputy U.S. representative on UNSCOB, the United Nations Special Commission on the Balkans. We traveled partly along the coast by the island of Thasos. Then once we got to Thrace, to Alexandroupolis, we took a Greek Army train, running roughly parallel to the Turkish border, as far as we could go to see what the situation was there.

I remember this train was composed of a lot of old, moldy coaches from the Orient Express. There was the threadbare red crushed velvet and all the rest of it. We had two or three of these coaches on the train, but ahead of the engine there was a couple of flatcars loaded with rock or some heavy cement blocks to detonate mines. That was quite an experience.

On the way back from this trip, I got into Salonika, went to the airport to fly down to Athens, and was out on the tarmac when the plane that I was to take came in, an old DC-3. One

of the passengers to get off was a man named George Polk, who was an American correspondent, fairly well known, who had been in Greece for sometime. I had a little conversation with him. He asked me what I'd been doing. I told him. I asked him what he was doing, and he said he'd come up to do a little investigating and reporting out of Salonika, but he didn't go into any details. So that was that.

I went back to Athens. About three days later, he turned up missing and eventually was discovered to have been murdered. They never really determined to full satisfaction who was responsible, whether it was the guerrillas or whether it was extreme rightists who were trying to create some kind of an emergency situation to embarrass the government. But I remember General Donovan came out from the United States to investigate this. He interviewed me, because as it turned out, I was the last Embassy officer to have talked to him. But I couldn't really tell him a great deal. He certainly hadn't said that he was going to try to get in touch with the rebels, which is what he, in fact, did. Anyway, that investigation went through several phases, but never fully revealed who was responsible. The incident did result in the establishment of the Polk Award.

Q: Yes, that's where I've heard the name. You went to Noum#a next?

ROSS: Yes. Nothing ever happened easily, you know. In the fall of '48, I got home-leave orders. It wasn't convenient for the post that I leave immediately, so I left in February of '49. In those days, you were able to travel by ship. By that time we had a second son, who had been born in Athens. We traveled on one of the Four Aces, not the Constitution or the Independence. Four days out, we put into Genoa. A friend of mine who had served with me in Athens, who had since been transferred to Germany, happened to be in Genoa when a cable came in from Athens to the Consulate General for me. When we docked at Genoa, he was on the dock side there, waving this cable. He came aboard, and this was a telegram transferring me to Noum#a.

Here I am, four days out of Athens, had left a household full of furniture there, with Gerry Drew in it house-sitting for me.

Q: When were you supposed to go?

ROSS: It didn't say. It just said I was transferred as principal officer, and I was to go. I knew where Noum#a was, I knew a little bit about it. I think Andrea may have known where it was. I'm surprised the Department didn't hear the commotion that went up. (Laughs)

Anyway, I was of two minds. We spent the rest of the voyage home, fretting about this completely unexpected move. I didn't know what the implications were. I didn't think it represented any dissatisfaction with my work, because I had just been promoted to class 4 at that point. But I didn't know what it was all about, and it certainly wasn't anything that I had figured in my calculations. It was very inconvenient for obvious reasons.

I went home and took counsel from a number of people, including Rob McClintock, about whether I should try to contest this or not. In the end, I decided not to. When it was obvious that I was going to go, the Department suddenly decided that I ought to have a little training in commercial work, so they sent me to a short course at the Department of Commerce with about 20 other people, which consisted of about six weeks here in Washington in training, then two weeks at a field office, in San Francisco in my case because I was going to California for home leave. So I went through all of that.

Then I went to California, had my leave, and then proceeded on at that stage alone to Noum#a, to settle in. One reason I went alone is that I wasn't at all sure what housing was going to be like. I got out there in August of '49, but in the fall of '48, there had been a hurricane that had taken the roof off of the third floor of the Consulate. We had a combined office and residence, office on the lower floor, residence quarters on the top two floors.

Well, the third floor was not usable because it didn't have a roof. This had happened ten months before, but still no roof. Just a kind of jury-rigged affair.

Q: No roof and no appropriation for a roof.

ROSS: That's right. So I went out alone. I was met by the non-career vice consul who was holding the fort there, an officer by the name of William Snidow. I had a few days overlap with him, and then he took off. Though I was “principal” officer, I was at that point the only officer, with an American clerk, who was an old master sergeant who had been out in the Pacific during World War II and had mustered out there, having married the daughter of one of the local merchants. Then I had an Australian clerk-secretary, and that was the staff.

My first order of business, apart from official duty, was to find a place to live. There wasn't much going. Eventually I did get a place owned by the nickel company. It was not very attractive, a cement block, but at least it was substantial. Since there were hurricanes, that was one of the things I was interested in. So I got this, and my family came out and joined me about a month later.

My work in Noum#a really fell into three parts. One was doing consular work in Noum#a itself. One was reporting on other territories in the district, because this district was the largest consular district in the world, most of it water, obviously. But it had about 14 island territories, some of them British, some of them French, and New Hebrides, a British and French condominium.

Q: Was there a significant American population?

ROSS: The office was in Noum#a simply because Noum#a was the headquarters of the South Pacific Commission, which had been established by an agreement amongst six countries having dependent territories in the Pacific, in 1947. They set up the secretariat general headquarters in Noum#a, in what was known as the Pentagon, which was Admiral

[William F.] Halsey's headquarters just outside of Noum#a in a place called Anse Vata. So that's why the office was there. We had had, until 1948, three consular posts in the South Pacific, but Congress, in one of its economy waves, decided they were only going to have one. Then where would it be? The consulate in Noum#a had been established just before the war. The one in Suva had been established a considerable time earlier, but in this century, I think. The one in Tahiti had been there since about 1830. Suva was where we had most of our commercial interests, and that had the best communications in the area. Tahiti was where most of the Americans were. I must say they ranged from beachcombers to the black-sheep sons of wealthy American families, a whole spectrum.

My immediate concern in New Caledonia, as far as the consular work was concerned, consisted of commercial reporting. New Caledonia was highly mineralized and had nickel mines and chromium mines. The nickel mines in New Caledonia in the old days, at the close of the last century, had been the leading nickel producers in the world. Then I think Canada took over.

Q: Were some of these mines French-owned?

ROSS: They were all French-owned.

Q: We were interested in the output.

ROSS: We were interested in the output. I reported on that. I reported on labor conditions. The population of New Caledonia in those days was about 60,000. It wasn't very large. Half of it was indigenous, Melanesians, not Polynesian. They were kinky haired, black, monolithic types. A quarter of the population was French. In addition to French officials from Metropolitan France, there were French merchant families that had been in New Caledonia for several generations, and then there were the descendants of the old French fon#ats, either common criminals or political prisoners who were sent there after the

commune in Paris in 1870. So you never asked anybody about his antecedents, because so many of them were descended from these people and were very sensitive about it.

Q: They weren't proud of it.

ROSS: Some of them were, some of them weren't. You didn't know whose ancestors were the criminals and whose were the political prisoners. Then the other quarter of the population was Tonkinese and Javanese who had come there before the Second World War as indentured labor to work in the mines. Their terms had expired during the war, but obviously there was no way of repatriating them. So they were still there in substantial numbers. It was a very, very interesting kind of society to report on.

Q: What was your transportation? Did you have your own airplane?

ROSS: Obviously, as far as the bulk of my consular work was concerned, citizenship and visa work and all that, it had to do mostly with people in outlying territories. There had been, until just before I got there, a French airline that had flown out of Southeast Asia and into Noum#a and Tahiti, but that went out of business. So there was no air connection with Tahiti. There was with Fiji. When I came in, Pan American was operating, and Quantas, the Australian airline, was operating. So when I went to Fiji, I normally took Quantas because they flew into Suva. They had old Sunderland flying boats, these double-decked things that flew at about 75 miles an hour, and with a head-wind, you practically stood still in the air. They never flew above about 2,000 or 3,000 feet, which was under cloud cover, not terribly comfortable. Pan American flew into the other side of Fiji, into Nadi International Airport. Noum#a was on the Nadi, Honolulu, L.A. or San Francisco run. So to go to Fiji and to New Hebrides, I went by air.

I only got to Tahiti twice in two years that I was in Noum#a. The first time I heard that there was an airline that was inaugurating service between Honolulu and Bora-Bora, which was an adjacent island to Tahiti. So I got authorization from the Department to fly from Noum#a to Honolulu, where I took this inaugural flight all the way back down on the other edge of

the triangle down to Bora-Bora. There I took an island steamer overnight to Papeete. I had expected to spend a week or ten days until this inaugural flight made its second swing, and I would go back to Honolulu. But as it turned out, there again as I arrived in Tahiti, I was met by a man waving a cable. He was our lessee, who rented the old consular premises. What was the cable? It was a message telling me I was about to be inspected in Noum#a! By the time I made this trip, I had a second officer, a career vice consul there. I expected therefore to be able to stay in Tahiti until this plane came back. Now I didn't know whether I could afford to wait that long.

So I asked immediately about a steamer schedule, and found that within four days' time, there was one coming through, one of the Messageries Maritimes ships out of Marseille, coming through the canal and stopping in Tahiti, then stopping in Noum#a, then Sydney.

So I had to do, in four days, what I would have taken a week or ten days to do, and I got practically no sleep the entire time, because the Americans were all over the place. I even had to crawl into a thatch hut on hands and knees to see one man who was in an advanced stage of elephantiasis, with swollen limbs, an American citizen who had been out there for years.

Anyway, I did my work and grabbed this ship, and went back. To give you an idea of the size of the district, it took eight days full sailing to get back to Noum#a—no stops. Nine days on the calendar, because you cross the Date Line, of course. Eight days full sailing.

I got back and cranked up for inspection. E. Tomlin Bailey was my inspector. Did you ever know Tom Bailey?

Q: I met him.

ROSS: He was the inspector. It was his first time out inspecting. He inspected us and, happily, we came through very well. His inspection was very useful, because I had a couple of problems he was able to help me with.

I might say that consular work, dealing with these outlying areas, was very difficult. Most of the Americans with whom I had to do the passport and citizenship work were in Tahiti, where mail took a long time to arrive. There was cable traffic, but a lot of documentation you couldn't get that way. We had all kinds of complicated cases, because the so-called Asiatic Bar zone still existed. Certain people born in that zone were not eligible to become American citizens, and therefore couldn't qualify as immigrants. I've forgotten all the details myself, except that it was an immense complication.

Proving paternity was another complication in a place like Tahiti.

Q: No birth records?

ROSS: People didn't bother to get married, and then they would want to bring their children to the States. How were you going to prove that a case was legitimate? So there were a fair number of cases, and a lot of them were really very complicated. We had a lot of interesting and difficult consular problems.The other thing that I was concerned with was the South Pacific Commission, because I was an advisor the whole time I was there to the U.S. delegations that came down semi-annually for South Pacific Commission sessions. Then I was appointed a member of the working committee, which did things between sessions.

Q: Was this to settle territorial disputes?

ROSS: No, this was a precursor of Point Four by a year or so, because the commission had been established by these six countries, the U.S., the U.K., France, New Zealand, Australia, and The Netherlands, to provide economic and social development and health facilities to their territorial possessions, their non-self-governing territories in the area.

Q: And presumably to coordinate?

ROSS: And to coordinate the efforts, that's right. Have joint programs, coordinate efforts. There were these semi-annual sessions to go over the program. A lot of it, I was at the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh sessions while I was in Noum#a. At the first couple of sessions, there was a lot of housekeeping involved and getting the staff. Like every other international organization, there were national quotas regulating staff for the secretariat and the various functional programs.

Q: Were they actually conducting some sort of economic assistance programs?

ROSS: Yes.

Q: The commission itself?

ROSS: Yes, technical assistance. We had a Secretary General, then a man in charge of health programs, a man in charge of economic development, a man in charge of social development and educational things, with staff all headquartered in the commission headquarters, making trips to the field as the occasion warranted. So I did a lot with the Commission.

When it came time for me to leave, the Department, in a moment of aberration, forgetting that I had been out almost 12 years, was going to assign me to Hanoi as principal officer. Then they suddenly realized I had to come back to Washington. So they called me back. By that time, on the basis of these two years, the Department regarded me as a colonial expert. (Laughs)

Q: We were just getting you back to the Department. You mentioned being colonial officer, but you mentioned you had something you wanted to add on the Noum#a experience.

ROSS: Yes. There are a couple of things that I think are of some interest. When I got a second officer at the end of my first year in Noum#a, he had no housing. I finally got from the French colonial government a lease on a property that we, in our generosity, had given

to the colonial government when we evacuated New Caledonia at the end of World War II. We put the second officer and his wife in it, but then it was a question of furnishing it. On one of these working sessions of the commission when I had to go to Sydney, Australia, my wife went with me, and I got authority from the Department to buy furniture. So in the two weeks that I was there on the working commission, she was over there scouring the furniture establishments in Sydney for furniture, which we bought and charged to the American consulate general in Sydney. They had received authority to do this. They eventually shipped all the stuff back to us, so that our second officer had furniture.

I also had gotten two American secretaries by that time, and they lived on the second floor of the consulate. By that time we had a decent roof put on, but we demolished the third floor.

I discovered at some point that I apparently was sent to Noum#a, among other things, because I spoke French, but I also discovered that I was about the fourth officer that had been tapped for this, including several fairly senior Class 3 types. It was a matter of what the Germans call sohadenfreude, the delight in somebody else's troubles, when I later learned that these people never got promoted again.

Q: So that proved that there's still that discipline.

ROSS: Right. Anyway, I thought it was worth noting.

Q: Yes.

ROSS: I reported for duty in Washington via some leave in California. I reported for duty in January of 1952 as acting officer in charge of non-self-governing territorial affairs in the Office of Dependent Area Affairs in the Bureau of the United Nations.

Q: This was IO?

ROSS: This is what we now know as IO. It was known as UNA in those days. We were UND—dependent area affairs. It was headed up by Ben Gehrig as office director, who, incidentally, was the brother of Lou Gehrig. It had two sections: one was dependent area affairs and one was trusteeship affairs.

Our principal function was backstopping our delegations in international bodies and at international meetings on colonial questions arising either in the non-self-governing or trusteeship context. Therefore, shortly after I got there, I found myself as an advisor and member of a U.S. delegation that went up to New York to the UN for a meeting of the very esoteric body called the Committee on Factors. This was a committee to determine those factors to be taken into account in deciding whether a territory was non-self-governing or not. This had arisen because under the charter, member governments having non-self-governing territories had undertaken to report annually on their administration of these territories for as long as they were in non-self-governing status. Once they became self-governing, the member country no longer had the obligation of reporting on them.

Differences arose early on, before I ever appeared on the scene, in early sessions of the UN. Differences arose between those members administering non-self-governing territories and other members of the United Nations, about whether a territory was, in fact, now self-governing or not, or whether somebody was trying to pull a fast one or fudge it or whatever.

So this committee had been set up to study these factors. As I say, it was a very esoteric kind of operation. We met at several different sessions, but we came up with a set of factors that was considered in full UN General Assembly.

In 1952, I went back once more to the South Pacific as an acting alternate commissioner for the U.S. at the ninth session of the South Pacific Commission.

Then in 1953, I was a member of the U.S. delegation for a meeting of—I've forgotten the name.

Q: What was its function?

ROSS: It was again in this context of non-self-governing territories. It was a special committee set up to report to the General Assembly on compliance with reporting requirements and on the administration of non-self-governing territories. The name included the article in the UN charter that required this report. So I was on that delegation. Ben Gehrig would go, or maybe the deputy director of the office would go, and we might have somebody from the Department of the Interior, because by that time, they were administering Guam and American Samoa.

Q: You were a delegate from the States.

ROSS: Yes, sitting as a U.S. delegate.

Q: Not part of the international secretariat?

ROSS: No, no. Incidentally these committees didn't include the full membership of the United Nations, but only those countries that had been designated to serve on a committee.Then I attended the eighth General Assembly of the United Nations in New York, as an advisor to the delegation. This was the first year of the Eisenhower Administration, and the U.S. rep in the Fourth Committee was Congresswoman Frances Bolton. So I was her advisor in that committee, along with one or two others. That session happened to be a matter of considerable interest to us, because we were then proposing to cease our reporting on Puerto Rico because there had been a referendum in Puerto Rico, and they had chosen, in a free election, not to become a state, not to become independent, but to become an associated free state.

Q: A self-governing territory.

ROSS: It was, and it was an interesting thing. They were American citizens, they were within the American customs arrangements, they could vote in presidential elections, but they did not have representation in Congress aside from a resident commissioner who participated in debates, but had no vote, because while being American citizens, they did not pay federal income tax. So it was a rather interesting and, in some respects, advantageous arrangement for them. This was the formula that had been devised, I think, by the then-governor of Puerto Rico, Governor Mu#oz Marin. Under these new arrangements, Puerto Rico was now self-governing in all of its internal affairs. We handled foreign relations and defense, but apart from that, it was self-governing.

We wanted the full United Nations General Assembly to agree with this. So there was a long and protracted debate because numbers of countries just weren't having any of it. Some of the Latinos thought that it was not the case. Obviously the Soviet Bloc was all against it, and a number of other countries. India was one of the leading opponents that we had there. In the debate, I took a certain perverse pleasure in priming Mrs. Bolton to ask them what they were doing in the Andaman islands and a few other places, which they didn't like particularly, but it made the point. Because they were being holier-than-thou, and they couldn't have borne the kind of scrutiny that we were getting.

The upshot was that finally the UN voted to accept our proposal that Puerto Rico was now self-governing, and so we ceased our reporting.

Q: It was the General Assembly that had to vote on it?

ROSS: Yes. It was the General Assembly. They handled all of the non-self-governing territories and trusteeships, except, I think, if I'm not mistaken, our strategic trusteeship over the Pacific islands that had been taken from Japan, which I think were then handled separately.

In between all of these sessions, of course, we were reading voluminous documentation that came out of this from the UN secretariat on the reporting received from all the other countries who were reporting on their territories, and we had to debate the pros and cons of that. I remember we were debating during my time there, and I think no conclusion was reached before I left UND, but in General Assembly we were debating The Netherlands-Antilles, which was going to become self-governing. Suriname and the Antilles. So it was a very interesting exercise, I must say.

I had never thought that I was going to be working on these questions, but I found it fascinating. I enjoyed it thoroughly, especially the multilateral negotiating aspect, because during these sessions in both the smaller bodies and full UN General Assembly, one of my duties was arm-twisting for the U.S., with particular regard to French-speaking and Spanish-speaking delegations.

Q: Yes, that's a fascinating way to get acquainted with a large group of diplomats.

ROSS: In the process I also became acquainted with departmental procedures in the three years I was there.

Q: You were there the whole three years?

ROSS: I was there the whole three years, yes. I was promoted to Class 3 while I was in this post, just as I took over the job, as a matter of fact. Then in late 1954 I was transferred. I was in a session at the United Nations in the Committee on Information from Non-self-governing Bodies when I was called to the telephone and found out that the Department wanted to send me to Beirut.

I had been living under the misapprehension, as it turned out, that I was going to go to Strasbourg to cover the Council of Europe. But they decided not to send me there; they sent me as head of the political section in Beirut.

Q: On the whole, I would say you got a more interesting job.

ROSS: I think I did, yes. I was not disappointed a bit at the way that turned out at all.

Q: So off you went to Beirut.

ROSS: Off I went to Beirut.

Q: By this time, did you have children in school? You were moving right in the middle of a school year.

ROSS: Right. I might say that when we were in Noum#a, we put our older son, the one who is now ambassador in Algeria, into French school. He was seven years old. He went into it cold, not knowing a word of French. He really had an awfully rough time the first two months. After that, he and the son of the director of the French school, who was in the same class, alternated as number one or two in the class for the rest of the time. He came out of Noum#a being trilingual in English, French, and Greek. We had a Greek nursemaid at the same time.

Q: Was he able to keep it up?

ROSS: The French, yes. He still speaks some Greek. Our other son, who was four years younger than his brother was also trilingual at a child's level.

Q: But that goes a little faster at that age.

ROSS: Yes, although, as it turned out, he is now the best Greek speaker of anybody except his Mama, the younger son, but that's because he lived with his grandmother for some time later on.

Q: Was your wife born in Greece?

ROSS: No, she was born in the United States, of Greek parents who were born in Greece, but she lived in Greece as a child for something over a year and went to school there. The family had planned that when my father-in-law made his pile, they would return permanently to Greece.

To prepare for life in Greece my wife, after regular American school, was sent everyday for two hours to a Greek school to learn to speak and read and write Greek. My father-in-law made his fortune, and the family went to Greece. My wife had this year in Greek school, and then the family decided they had made a mistake, and came back to the States. But meanwhile, she had acquired proficiency in Greek to the point that when we were later in Greece, she was called upon by Ambassador MacVeagh on several occasions to act as interpreter. I remember one vividly: she was the interpreter between him and the Regent Archbishop Damaskinos. So that shows you what the caliber of her Greek was.

Q: It certainly does, indeed.

ROSS: I went out to Beirut as head of the political section, a two-officer section apart from our adjunct from across the Potomac. I had Pierre Graham as my number-two in the section. When I got there, Armin Meyer was Charg# d'affaires, but left about three months later. Then Ambassador Heath came and was there for the remainder of my time in Beirut.

Beirut was a truncated assignment for me, but I served there for a year and a half, and it was a fascinating place, in many respects a political officer's dream. You had no problem getting people to talk to you or having sources. The problem was to refine what you got, to evaluate it, and put it in perspective, because everybody there, without exception, who gave you information, was grinding his or her axe.

Q: I had a somewhat similar experience in Rome a few years after this.

ROSS: It was a fascinating place. Another dimension that made it fascinating was that the political arrangements in Beirut had a confessional basis. In other words, the posts in

the government all were allotted according to your religion. The president was a Maronite Christian; the prime minister was a Sunni Muslim; the head of the Parliament was a Shia Muslim; the minister of defense was a Druze; the head of security was a Maronite Christian. The whole Cabinet was divided along these lines. The Greek Orthodox also had their input as did the Greek Catholics, Syrian Catholics, Syrian Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, and Armenian Catholics—in the Cabinet or in the Parliament or in both.

I had to keep in touch with the leaders of these religious communities. I knew Patriarch Meouchi, who eventually became a cardinal because the Maronite church was in communion with Rome, and I knew the heads of all of the others. It was fascinating to travel around the country and meet them, talk to them, and then try to explain to the Department what was happening in the various communities.

Q: You were there before it really started to seriously break down?

ROSS: The thing was going well then, as well as that kind of an arrangement could go. But the frailties were apparent because you could see that this allotment of power was highly artificial. There was a gentlemen's agreement in 1943, when the country became self-governing before independence. This allotment was based then on the last census that had been taken in 1932. So it was out of date, but it was on the basis of this census that the Christian element was deemed a majority. Obviously it was to the Christian advantage to keep it that way, but the suspicion if not the belief was widespread that the situation had changed. Recognition of this likelihood had led the government to enfranchise all Lebanese living abroad to vote in their presidential and parliamentary elections, because most of the Lebanese abroad were Christian and therefore could be counted on to swell the Christian vote. This artificial arrangement was frail and out of date, and we knew that sooner or later, people were going to become dissatisfied. There was already some of that.We knew that the Shia were the most disaffected ones, because considering their numbers, they came out on the short end. Economically, they had the short end of the stick. The Sunnis were in much better place economically and socially.

The other thing was, of course, that we had these Palestinian refugee camps. You didn't have to be clairvoyant to know that if this situation continued, you were going to have an explosion, because conditions in the camps were simply deplorable. You could see what was going to happen if you had a whole generation that were raised in this kind of a situation, with no hope for a solution.

Some of the Palestinians did very well, the professional people—for example, doctors, lawyers, wealthy ones. They integrated into Lebanese society, found jobs, and were successful to the point where there was a certain amount of jealousy in some areas.

Q: They were very intelligent people.

ROSS: Yes. So you could see where trouble could coalesce and begin to operate there.

Q: Meanwhile, it was still a good place to live.

ROSS: It was a fabulous place, yes, with a terribly heavy social schedule. We were out every night. We drew the line at Sunday, because otherwise we had not much time to spend with the boys. At that point we had a German governess.

Q: So they were adding German to their languages?

ROSS: Not really, because she spoke English fairly well.

We had this tremendous social schedule, two and three cocktail parties every night, dinner practically every night, and it was really fantastic. We has constant access to the people who were doing the ruling on both the Christian and the Muslim sides.

Q: Do you have any particular comments on Heath as a chief of mission?

ROSS: From my standpoint, I found him very supportive and a very good chief to work for. He certainly had us in on lots and lots of his high-level social engagements. Most of

the people involved we knew anyway, but we were able to further these contacts and were of use to him. He and his wife both played the piano. There was one grand piano in the embassy residence, and they brought one with them, so they had side-by-side grand pianos nested there, and they would play piano duets.

I had John Emerson then as the DCM, who was an excellent man.

Q: I knew John a little later, when he was in Paris for a while.

ROSS: Heath; and Emerson were very good to me and, I think, probably responsible for the fact that my assignment there was truncated because it was through their good offices and support that I was assigned to the 1956-57 War College class.

Q: Which happens to be the year after I was there in 1955-56.

ROSS: You were there, then, with Bob Moore.

Q: Yes.

ROSS: We had a truncated session there. I was there a year and a half. I had gone out there with the serious intention of trying to learn Arabic. I might just say that I came into the Foreign Service wanting to be an Arabist, but as you know, I came in in 1940, and up to that point we had always sent our would-be Arabists to Paris to Ecole des Langues Orientales. That, of course, ceased with the German occupation of Paris and the war conditions. So there was no opportunity to learn Arabic. I did take a few lessons in Mexico City at my first post. But my teacher, who professed to be a Syrian priest, a Christian priest, after a few lessons (my wife and I were taking these together), asked us so many questions about what we were doing, that we thought there was something a little funny. We broke it off. Much later back in Washington, I read in the press that this guy had been picked up as a Gestapo agent. (Laughs) So there you are.

The point is that I had no Arabic prior to coming to Beirut. I wanted to learn some. I did take a few lessons, but then I was too busy, really, to give it the kind of attention it deserved, and I discovered that everybody I talked to there either spoke English or French or both, and they were not interested in hacking around with me in Arabic. So there really was not that kind of opportunity. From that standpoint, I was a little disappointed. Otherwise, Beirut was a great assignment and prepared me for future assignments and for understanding some of the things that were happening when I was at the War College and the Suez Crisis broke out.

Q: For anybody who had been in that part of the world, that was a very exciting year.

ROSS: It was. I was the only one in the class from the Middle East, so I spent a lot of time talking to not just my State Department colleagues, but, more importantly, the military there about what was going on. After a while, it was sort of overshadowed by the Hungarian thing.

Q: That was my problem. I was handling Austrian affairs in the Department that year, and Suez took so much attention away from the Hungarian problem.

ROSS: Yes.

Q: Do you have a high point or two on that time?

ROSS: I did the usual things. We did a session at the UN once. We didn't do much traveling in the States outside of Washington, but I did go on the first African field trip. My crystal ball was clouded, obviously, because my rationale was, “I am never going to serve in Africa, but I think I ought to know something about it,” particularly since I had had some indication that I might be going to Cairo next. Nasser had pretensions of being a leader in Africa. So I wanted to know something about the hinterland. I took this trip, and it was a fascinating trip, I must say.

Q: What points did you hit?

ROSS: We went first to Senegal, which was still French, and Dakar was the administrative point for all the French West Africa. All of the countries soon thereafter became independent. Then we went to Monrovia, to Liberia. I must say that was something, because particularly the military side just couldn't believe its eyes or ears. In some respects, Liberia was so behind other African countries in terms of evolution. It was almost a caricature. I hesitate to say this, because I don't want to be misunderstood as a racist; I'm not. I'm just telling the situation as it looked to them. I liked the Liberians, but their way of doing things and their speech and all the rest was a little like “Amos and Andy,” really. This is the way it struck my colleagues, and I kept having to explain the origin and subsequent evolution of the country. I remember that the one official affair in our honor we had to wear black tie or dress uniforms, amidst all the heat and the rest of it. My military colleagues just thought this was hilarious. It was hard to get them to take the place seriously.

From there we went south to Leopoldville.

Q: Did you go to South Africa?

ROSS: Yes, we did. We went to Cape Town, because at that season of the year, the Embassy was in Cape Town. One of the high points there was attending a session of the Parliament, so we saw how it conducted itself.

Then we went to Louren#o Marques, Mozambique.

Q: In the interest of your naval concerns.

ROSS: Yes. At that point, this was where the South Africans came when they wanted to let off steam and gamble and fraternize. It was still very much Portuguese. I remember

we were received by the governor general, who served us some excellent 75-year-old Madeira.

From there we went up to Nairobi, which was great. I met Kenyatta. This was May of 1956.

Q: Where was this in relation to Mau Mau?

ROSS: This was after Mau Mau. Those troubles were over. That was the early fifties. Kenyatta was in the government, which was preparing for eventual independence from the British. I was at dinner with him and with Tom Mboya, the chap who was eventually assassinated. A charming man.

We got to see Treetops, the safari spot out there.

Q: I was supposed to go there once. My wife got there, but I had something else called me out, so I never got to see it.

ROSS: We got to the old Treetops. I think the thing burned down at some point.

From there we went to Ethiopia Addis, in 1957, was still very friendly. They had one very good hotel, the Ghion, where we stayed, but at night you could hear the hyenas and the lions roaring out by the city dump. They were rummaging through what was out there. I was fascinated to see the embassy compound, because at some point or other, I had read at length in Foreign Relations of the United States for the years 1935 and '36, at the time of the Italian about the hair-raising experiences that our legation had, particularly during the interregnum that prevailed for a while, a day or two after the Ethiopians pulled out of Addis, and before the Italians came in. Our people were literally manning the compound walls with guns to fend off marauders.From there we went to Tunis, where I served as group interpreter with the long session we had with Bourguiba.

Q: Tunis was already just about independent by then.

ROSS: It was.

Q: I was there a year later.

ROSS: Yes, it was independent.

Q: I guess it was '57.

ROSS: Louis Jones was there. He was there and Dave McKillop was there as DCM.

From there we went to Morocco with Cavendish Cannon and his wife. There again we met with Crown Prince Hassan, and again I did the interpreting.

At the termination of the War College trip, I came back to the War College and finished the paper that I had in progress on Africa, specifically on the communist penetration of Africa.

Q: Then you took your next posting right away?

ROSS: A little leave, and I went then to Cairo as political counselor.

Q: Ray Hare was in Cairo?

ROSS: Ray Hare was the ambassador, and Pete Hart was DCM at the time I got there. We served together for about six or seven months, and then he was replaced by Norbert Anschutz, who was there for the balance of the time I served in Cairo.

I came out as political counselor, but as it turned out, for the first few weeks I was there, I was the only State Department officer in the political section, which again threw into disarray my prospects for beginning serious Arabic studies, with the consequence that I really never got down to it. So that went by the board there.

Q: This was full Nasser, wasn't it?

ROSS: This was full Nasser. Yes, this was 1957, just after the Suez crisis. We had been of some assistance there when we got the Israelis and the Brits and others to desist. But one wasn't conscious of any great sense of gratitude.

Q: No pro-American wave?

ROSS: No. For a good part of the time I was there, the press and the other media were attacking us. Happily, you did not find any reflection of this in the attitude of the Egyptian on the street. So that, of course, made life much more pleasant.

Q: Seen from inside, was there an actual Soviet orientation to the Nasser government?

ROSS: At that time, not really. The Nasser government was a nationalist government. The Soviet presence, however, was there. They were beginning their steps toward the building of the Aswan Dam, so they were there.

Q: As I recall it, about the time you went there, Dulles announced that we would not participate in the Aswan Dam.

ROSS: No, he did that before I got there. So the climate officially was not all that friendly. I had contacts in the foreign office. They were by no means as free and easy as they had been in Beirut. It was a much bigger post, with a much bigger diplomatic representation. I think I had meetings with my counterparts in other embassies to a much greater extent than I'd had hitherto in my career. There were several Latin American embassies in town, who used to resort to conversations with me and check what was going on, check their impressions against ours. They spoke to me because I spoke Spanish. The Brazilian ambassador was an old, old career Brazilian ambassador. He must have been in his early seventies at that point. He had a monthly meeting with me, he speaking in Portuguese, and I speaking in Spanish, but we got along famously. That was great.

Q: You did better in understanding Portuguese than I ever did, but then your Spanish was better than my Spanish ever was. (Laughs)

This raises a point which I've always thought of. In many of these posts, particularly some of the more difficult posts, the American ambassador did have—although the term would not have been acceptable to them—an in loco parentis relationship to the Latino diplomatic corps.

ROSS: Yes, and it was even more pronounced when I was in Haiti. I also found it useful having an “in” with the Greek diplomatic corps.

Q: A tremendous Greek colony.

ROSS: They were rapidly diminishing, but they still had substantial numbers both in Cairo and in Alexandria and a couple of other places in the country. The Italians also, although I didn't have quite the same rapport with them. I had a very good relationship with the DCM. He and I had both gone through the War College together, and we had known each other since Greek days. So that was an old friendship. With Pete Hart I also had very, very good relations.

In addition to the political reporting that I personally generated there, or that my section generated, sometimes Ambassador Hare, following his conversations with Nasser or with Foreign Minister Fawzi, would come back to the chancery and would, in effect, debrief. I would then set that into a telegram for him. I found that a very interesting and useful operation.

Q: You also dealt with the foreign office officials.

ROSS: I did, but at a level just below Fawzi. Mine was with deputies and with chiefs of sections and that kind of thing. We didn't have the same terribly easy access, although I had one or two old friends in the foreign office there, particularly after the formation of

the United Arab Republic in 1958 between Egypt and Syria, when some of the Syrian diplomats...

[End Tape II, Side 1. Begin Tape II, Side 2]

Q: Ambassador Ross, you were talking about your reporting and relations with the Syrians.

ROSS: Yes. These Syrian diplomats, now residents, some of them, in the Cairo ministry there, were a little more accessible, partly because we'd known each other before. They didn't feel quite as “uptight” that the Egyptians did. So that helped.

After the formation of the United Arab Republic we did not have an embassy any longer at Damascus; we had a consulate general. Therefore, from the standpoint of reporting, it was under our supervision and, to a certain extent, guidance, although we had a very senior man there for most of the time that I was still in Cairo. It was Borden Reams, who was consul general. I would go periodically to Damascus, confer with him and his staff, and then I made it a point always to come out via Beirut, first to see my son, who was in school there at the American Community School, and secondly, to touch base with our embassy in Beirut, which was always a useful experience. Rob McClintock was ambassador at that point.

Q: How complete was the formation of the UAR? Did they really integrate the government?

ROSS: Not to the extent that they had anticipated or that one looking at it from the outside might have expected. As you know, it was relatively short-lived.

Q: Yes. I was wondering if they were really serious about it while it did exist.

ROSS: One must assume that, yes, there were serious intentions at the outset. But the interests and the outlooks of the two countries were not parallel by any means, so I think that these differences surfaced almost from the beginning.

Q: What was the relative psychological attitude of the Syrians and the Egyptians towards each other? Did the Syrians tend to look up to the Egyptians, as I know the Iraqis did?

ROSS: No, I think that the Syrians at that point already felt that they were their own people. I think that's one of the factors that worked against a long life for this particular arrangement. Numbers of them, I think, were not terribly happy in Cairo, those who came, and perhaps felt that their talents were not being utilized. I'm talking now about the Syrian diplomats being utilized to the full.

During my time there, we had a number of visits from African dignitaries, so that my War College experience was of value. One of them who came up was Kwame Nkrumah from Ghana. He came up, having picked out a bride from among several candidates in the Christian Coptic community in Egypt. He took her back to Ghana and married her.

Q: Did he have four wives?

ROSS: I think that at one point he may have had more than one. I'm not sure. I can't remember now whether that marriage lasted until he died or not. I sort of lost track. I never got to Ghana later on, so I never had a chance to follow up on it.

Q: I saw Nkrumah in Hungary. He visited Budapest in the early sixties, so it was a little later than this.

ROSS: I had seen him, too, later in Conakry. I had been in regular contact with the Latin delegations in Cairo. Among them was the Cuban charg# d'affaires. With the change of r#gime in Cuba and the advent of Fidel Castro, this Cuban charg# stayed on and was able to maintain himself in office for a time. I think maybe to some extent he tried to accommodate to the new r#gime but in the long run he was not successful. He was still there, however, in late 1959 or early '60 when Che Guevara led a Cuban delegation to Cairo. Jim Cortada, who was in the economic section of our embassy, and I, through the

Cuban charg#, met Che Guevara and spent an evening with him, which was the subject of a long report that we sent into the Department.

Q: That's probably something in your security file from then on. (Laughs)

ROSS: I gather that the report was of some interest because this was while we still had relations with Cuba.

There was one amusing incident. When Che Guevara and his entourage came—in a Cuban military plane, of course—the Egyptian dignitaries were all out there, the protocol staff and all the rest. One of the last Cubans off the plane was somebody dressed in fatigues, as they all were, but this was a young person with long hair. The protocol officer rushed up and said, “Ah, Mrs. Guevara, we're so delighted to see you.” It turned out to be Lieutenant so and so, a man! (Laughs)

Q: Were the British and French on short representation there at this time?

ROSS: Yes, they were. Both of them, because of Suez and relations broken. During my last year or year and a half there, they began to come in bit by bit. So there was a British interest section. I've forgot now under whose flag they were flying—probably the Swiss—but they were in their old embassy, which was a rather imposing one, and the section was headed up by a man named Colin Crowe, who was one of their stars, who eventually became their rep to the United Nations and ended up a GCMG.

The French had a smaller outfit, but they also came back in, ostensibly I think in a kind of commercial capacity, but they were doing political reporting and all that. I was in close touch both with the Brits and with the French. They had two or three officers there. One, I remember, had the name of Mouton, and a young man named Bellivier, who I think at the moment is their ambassador in Mauritania. We worked closely with them as they were getting started in making their come-back in Cairo.

Q: What were our own problems predominantly at the time that we had to work on with the Egyptians? Just being frosty and correct?

ROSS: Yes. The Arab-Israeli question was there.

Q: But no one worked on that during that time?

ROSS: Not really, no, but we were seen as being too supportive of Israel and not sufficiently attentive to Arab and Egyptian needs. The fact that we had pulled out of any Aswan Dam deal was resented, and the Soviets were taking advantage of it. On the other hand, we were able to maintain a spectrum of contacts, and we had people through there all the time, including congressional delegations. There were other distinguished travelers—Dorothy Thompson, for example. I remember also meeting the British travel writer, who I think is still alive, Freya Stark.

Q: Was it during this period that Yemen also became part of the UAR?

ROSS: No, not precisely when I was there. Actually, Ambassador Hare was accredited to Yemen as Minister, and we had a resident charg# there. I kept hoping that Hare would go down there at some point during my tenure, because it was understood that I'd go with him if he did.

Q: A fascinating place, apparently.

ROSS: Yes. It never came off in my time. While I was in Cairo, I did a trip with our naval attach# there in his plane, went to Jeddah and flew over Yemen, went down to Aden, and then came back through Port Sudan and Khartoum, as a kind of area orientation.

Q: During this time, I was in contact in Rome with an Italian named Guillet, who was there.

ROSS: I knew Guillet. He used to come up and debrief for us.

Q: At that time, as I remember it, we didn't have anybody there.

ROSS: From early 1959 on, we did. I know we were dependent on Guillet in 1957-58. We always made it a point to meet with Guillet. He would let us know he was coming, and we would meet with him and hear what he had to say about events in the Yemen.

Q: Before you left, Freddie Reinhardt came?

ROSS: Yes. This is all involved with my next post. I had taken home leave in the fall of 1959 and had been assured that I was going to be in Cairo for at least another year. I got back in October or November of '59. Shortly after that, Ray Hare left. Norb Anschutz was in charge for a time, and then Freddie Reinhardt was appointed. Before he got to post, I got a message from the Department indicating that they were looking for somebody to be DCM in Conakry, and asked me if there was any reason why I wouldn't be able to take the job. I must say, in all frankness, I was not enchanted. I replied that they had only recently told me I would be in Cairo for another year and I made plans with that in mind. I also said my wife was just then undergoing an operation in Cairo. I suppose you would say it was minor surgery, but you never know. It did necessitate a certain convalescence, and I was loath to leave.

I spell all of this out, but the upshot was that they did send me to Conakry. What happened was that Freddie Reinhardt knew all the circumstances, and he thought when he left Washington to come to post, that he had it settled that I was going to stay. But he hadn't been there but about a week or so, and he had just presented credentials, when he had a personal message from Loy Henderson, saying they wanted him to release me and send me off to Conakry.

So at the end of March 1960, I left Cairo alone, leaving my wife and our younger son, who was in school in Cairo.

Q: Leaving your wife to "pack, pay, and follow," as they say.

ROSS: Yes, more or less. I did get the Department to agree to send me to Conakry on TDY so that I could come back to Cairo in June, make proper farewells, pick up my family, go to Beirut, pick up my son there, who was graduating from ACS, and then come back. Meanwhile, I went for a brief week or so in the States to read in on things West African, and then went to Conakry, where I arrived at the end of the first week of April of 1960.

A couple of days later, Guinea was the host to the Non-Aligned Nations' Conference. I knew a lot of the people because I had been covering one earlier in Cairo. So that was something to do right at the outset.

I might say that I apparently was called to Conakry because of a situation at post, a rather delicate one. The ambassador there was the brother of President Eisenhower's minority affairs advisor in the White House, and he was a professor of romance languages in a small college in the South.

Q: This was John H. Morrow.

ROSS: This was Morrow. He had come out there in the summer of '59. At some point in the beginning of '60, I think as a consequence of some actions taken by the DCM and the political officer there, he got the impression that they were working against him in some way. He demanded that they both be transferred forthwith. So the thing developed into a kind of emergency situation, and that's why I was sent there. Obviously, the first thing I had to do was to establish a proper rapport with the ambassador and clear that up.

This was my first and only time as a DCM, and both of my ambassadors there were political. I was in a position to appreciate that that was in many respects the most difficult position in the Foreign Service, because you are between a rock and a hard place, between the ambassador on the one side, and the staff on the other. One had to be very sensitive to his reactions. As it turned out, we got on very well together, and we didn't have

any problems of that nature. But one had to always be on the qui owe, because you never knew when something you thought was quite innocuous would be taken amiss.

Morrow had come to Conakry full of enthusiasm, thinking that with his background, etc., he would be able to establish a close and useful rapport with Sekou Toure. Well, the United States was not in terribly good odor at that point, because when in 1958 they had the referendum of French territories, everybody voted to stay with France except Guinea, and the French took umbrage at this and literally pulled everything out that was movable.

Then the Guineans, I think, expected us to come in right away at the end of '58, at least come in, show our presence, and begin to pick up some of the slack and help them out in this period. We didn't do that. Months and months went by. We finally sent somebody out there as charg# to open the post, and we moved slowly. As I say, Morrow got out there about June or July of 1959, Guinea having become independent at the closing months of '58.

Then, of course, the Soviet Bloc was in there in strength, and such training as Sekou Toure had had, had been within the context of French labor unions, which, of course, were very far to the left. So his sympathies, his point of view, were on that side of things. He was very astute politically, really, but knew absolutely nothing about economic questions.

Q: How was he as an administrator?

ROSS: I suppose within the African context, he wasn't bad. Certainly as a political organizer, he was very good, because Guinea was organized down to the grass roots, down to the last village, you know. But he knew nothing about economics and there was just a handful of Guineans who did know something about it. Most of them had had some degree of Western training. I remember the man who for a time headed up the mining operation there, had some training at Harvard. But the very fact that they were Western-

trained made them suspect, so they were never fully utilized, even when they were left in position.

As a result, although Guinea had tremendous natural resources and was much better off than most of the newly independent countries in Africa from that standpoint, it didn't get them properly organized.

One of our principal interests there was in the economic sector. Olin Matheson had a mining operation in Guinea to refine bauxite. We didn't make aluminum there, but we refined the bauxite ore into alumina. It's a kind of first-stage operation. Then that was shipped out to various points for further refinement. At any rate, that was our economic interest there, and was one of the principal, if not the principal, foreign exchange earners.

Q: That process takes a lot of electricity, doesn't it?

ROSS: Yes, it does, but they had water power. They had the natural resources and should have done much better. At that stage, bauxite prices were interesting, you know. So they could have gone much further than they did, and that was always a source of disappointment to us.

The diplomatic corps there, of course, was heavily “block.” The French were in there, the British, the Israelis, and the Germans.

Q: West Germans?

ROSS: East Germans were there, too. We had everybody and his brother in there from that side, even Outer Mongolia!

Q: I didn't realize in those days that the West Germans would go in the same place as the East Germans, or vice versa.

ROSS: They did. Outer Mongolia was there, North Korea was there. I think we had everybody from behind the curtain except the Albanians.

Q: The Albanians weren't noted for aid, so they weren't encouraged, I guess. (Laughs)

ROSS: No. We had the North Vietnamese, which, of course, made some difficulties. We weren't in Vietnam then to the extent that we came later, but we were obviously on opposite sides. The Guineans were very pro-North Vietnam, and also pro-Cuban. So it was interesting from the standpoint of the composition of the diplomatic corps and the problems it presented.

I was charg# there on a number of occasions, and was generally the ranking charg# at that point. The junior ambassador was the Outer Mongolian, so we were always standing together in these lines. He spoke no English, and I spoke no Chinese. After we had exhausted my half a dozen phrases in Russian, there was a great silence, except on the rare occasions when he had his French interpreter with him. I would invariably turn up alongside him. He was a nice enough guy, you know.

Q: In those days, the Chinese were not willing to speak to us.

ROSS: Oh, no. That's right. I had the same thing in Tanzania later on.

Q: Midway through, you got Bill Attwood there.

ROSS: With the end of the Eisenhower Administration the day came when Morrow, got his dismissal, although I must say, though, considering that he was an appointee of a Republican administration, the Kennedy Administration didn't leave him out completely. They sent him to Paris, where he was our rep to UNESCO. So he didn't do too badly. I saw him there eventually later on.

Attwood was assigned and arrived in April of 1961. Just before he arrived, Morrow—I was in the negotiations to some extent—negotiated an aid agreement with the Guineans. Up to the time that Attwood arrived, we didn't have anybody in place. We had a couple of visits from AID officials, but there wasn't any program under way yet. I must confess that I wasn't all that keen on the advisability at that stage of doing much of anything, given the general state of relations and the difficulty of working with the Guineans.

I was really at swords drawn from the day I arrived until the day I left, particularly with respect to customs clearances, because it was really terribly difficult to pry things out of customs, perfectly legitimate, run-of-the-mill diplomatic shipments, you know. But they'd hold the things up and then they'd try to charge you rent for the fact that the things were in customs that long. It was their dilatory tactics. We never did pay any duty the whole time, but it was just a continual battle.

There were other restrictions on us. We couldn't travel outside of Conakry without special permission from the Foreign Office. You had to lay it all out, and then you'd wait around until they got around to giving you permission. So it was very hard to plan very far in advance. You couldn't be sure that you were going to get permission or what you would run into. So it was not a very good working atmosphere.

Then they had left the franc zone, an action that they took about the week after I got there. They just overnight left the franc zone and created their own currency, the Guinean franc, which, of course, had no value outside of Guinea. Those few enterprises that were working there, such as the leading hotel, which had a certain number of European employees and ran fairly well, was an attractive place with a good restaurant. It started to go downhill, because it was not allowed to repatriate any profits, and it's owners weren't about to keep plowing money back into the operation if they couldn't take anything out. So everything started to wind down. The elevators stopped running. The food in the restaurant got progressively worse. The man in charge of it used to have to go out at least once a week, sometimes more often, with his truck, sweep through the surrounding countryside, buying

up anything he could find. Happily, we were on the coast, so I wonder how many meals I had of Shrimp Proven#al, because you could get shrimp.

The prices were outrageous. A little bottle of East German beer was the equivalent of $2.50. This is back in 1960! It was just fantastic. There was nothing in the stores to buy, eventually, you see. If your electric light bulb went out, you couldn't replace it.

Q: And you couldn't really import it.

ROSS: It was difficult. We eventually got stuff, but it was not easy. A number of countries resorted to flying in foodstuffs for their embassy staffs. I could never get Ambassador Morrow to do that. He didn't want to do it, because he knew the Guineans didn't like it.

Q: Did you have an air attach# plane?

ROSS: No, we didn't have any attach#s. So that we were, in effect, dependent on what did come in on French coastal ships that came in out of Bordeaux and Marseille. They would bring things. Sometimes you would get ships in from the Bloc every now and then, and suddenly the word would go around that the Polish hams were in the store. Well, they were in there for no more than two hours, you know. That was the kind of atmosphere in which we lived and worked.

We were in terribly crowded and inadequate office space when I got there, and just before Morrow left, I managed to get other premises leased for us, and we moved in just before Attwood arrived. This was a larger space. It wasn't ideal by any means, but considering what there was available, it was about the best we could hope to have.

Attwood came, and as you know, he was a political appointee, with a background in journalism. He was a very good man. We became good friends. I was fond of him. From the outset, we got together and decided how we were going to operate. He left to me

the running of the embassy. He was concerned about representational aspects, moving Kennedy's program forward, getting the AID thing under way.

Q: Did he try to get a Peace Corps in there?

ROSS: We didn't have a Peace Corps in my day, no, and I think it would have been a mistake at that point, given the general suspicion under which we operated. But he did move forward on the AID side. So by the time I left, we were beginning to have an AID program.

Q: Was it mostly technical assistance at the beginning?

ROSS: Yes. I was charg#. About two weeks after Attwood arrived, he went back to Washington for two or three weeks on this aid business. He came back, then went down to Lagos to a chiefs of mission conference, leaving me in charge. He went down sometime in July, came back at the very beginning of August. He wasn't feeling terribly well, got progressively worse, and on the 16th of August, we shipped him out on a stretcher. He had polio, although he didn't know it then. He suspected it, but the medical situation in Guinea was such that we couldn't really get a diagnosis. There was one French doctor who wasn't all that great.

Q: And the sanitation was terrible.

ROSS: Just terrible. The hospital there was just god-awful. It was a three-story concrete structure. This is characteristic: The admissions office was up on the second floor, so that you had to walk up there regardless of your problem. The walls on both sides of the stairway going up there, the cement walls, were splattered with blood. Jesus, I mean it was a mess, you know. I don't know how the Bloc types, Bloc doctors of one kind or another, worked. They couldn't have liked it. The point is that we couldn't get a diagnosis on Attwood, but the moment that he got up to Dakar, doctors there saw him and saw

immediately what it was. We got a message right back that it was polio. So he went on and was gone until just before Christmas.

Q: Did they ship him up to Germany?

ROSS: No, he went to the States. His wife went along. He was very determined to overcome this thing, and it took a great effort and will power to be able to do it. His wife helped him with all the exercises and all the rest of it, so that when he came back just before Christmas of 1961, he had a limp otherwise, he was not in too bad shape. Eventually, this all disappeared.

Q: He was still limping quite a bit when he was in Kenya.

ROSS: Yes, but by the time he got around to seeing me in Haiti, he was fine. We worked very well together.

Q: He was, I imagine, a little bit of an unguided missile, wasn't he?

ROSS: Yes. I felt that part of my duty there was to do what I could to give him my opinion on some of the things he had in mind. He had a lot of good ideas.

Q: I was extremely fond of both him and Sim, as a matter of fact, largely because he and I had the same opinion of our next-door neighbor in Ethiopia. (Laughs)

ROSS: Right.

Q: Then you had another shot in the Department?

ROSS: Yes. Just before I left Guinea, Governor Williams came through. Incidentally, Guinea was a great place for meeting important political leaders, not just African chiefs of state. We had Nkrumah; we had Tubman; we had Margai from Sierra Leone. But we had President Luebke from West Germany; we had Tito; we had Brezhnev and Mikoyan from

the Soviet Union, Sukarno, King Hussein and others. Some of these were state visits. Tito, for example, came down in his yacht, and there was great fanfare that went on for days and days. I had known his advance man, who had been my opposite number in Cairo. We were in on all of that.

Q: "Soapy" Williams came through. Is that what got you back to the States?

ROSS: Yes. He came through and asked me to join him on the rest of his trip through Africa. Guinea, I think, was his first or second stop, so I became chief spear-carrier for him for the balance of his trip. He had a whole plane, of course. Mike Rives was also with him as was Nancy Williams. So we did a swing through Africa beginning in April and lasting till mid-May. We went to Sierra Leone, Dahomey, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Togo, and the Congo. We opened the consulate in Stanleyville. This was '62. Then we were in Rwanda and Burundi just the month before those two places became independent, went up to Kenya, and Upper Volta, at which point I left and went back to Conakry to help my wife pack up.

Q: By that time, you'd been hired to come back to the Department.

ROSS: Yes. He said, "I want you to come back to the Department to be the Director of AFW," which I believe was practically all of French speaking sub-Sahara Africa and English speaking West Africa.

Q: It didn't include East Africa?

ROSS: I don't think it included the English-speaking countries of East Africa.

Then just before I left Guinea, we got a message saying that he had decided that all of his office directors should have been ambassadors beforehand, and he wanted me to accept the position of deputy director. Well, all right. So I did that.

Then, by God, before I got into the job, there was yet another change, and they split that office, AFW, into two, one of which was AFU, and that was all of the French-speaking part of sub Saharan Africa, including Madagascar. So I ended up nominally as deputy director of that office. Actually, I logged a lot of time as acting director the one year I was in the job. I thought I was back for a three- or four-year assignment; that's what I expected. But as it turned out, at the end of that first year, I was being selected to go to Argentina as minister counselor, and then “Soapy” decided to send me out as Ambassador to the Central African Republic and that took precedence.

Q: Do you have any comments you'd like to make now on the team of Williams and Frederick? I think they made a very considerable contribution.

ROSS: Oh, they did. They did. “Soapy” wasn't very good at departmental in-fighting, as many of us found out fairly quickly. So you couldn't always be sure he was going to be able to deliver the goods, as much as he wanted to or you wanted to. His attention span wasn't all that great on a given problem, but his heart was certainly in the right place. He had some good ideas. Some were not so good. One must say that the Africans liked him very much. They sensed that here was somebody who was really interested in their problems and would spend the time to talk with them. So from that standpoint, he was very good.

Q: I would say he did a good deal to boost the amour propre of the African Bureau.

ROSS: He did have some political standing and that may be why we sometimes thought we didn't get all that we should have gotten in terms of result.

Q: How about Wayne? He's always been a mysterious figure to me.

ROSS: He was away a good bit of the time, running around South Africa and the High Commission territories; that part of Africa was what he was really interested in.

Q: He was a real ideologue on that.

ROSS: That's right, yes.

Q: I think he was trying to invent the problem that didn't exist.

ROSS: Yes?

Q: At least I remember one African Ambassadors meeting we had in 1963, where he went around the room saying he wanted everybody to tell him how important the South African question, Apartheid, and all that was.

Q: We were just in the Department, and you were getting ready to go.

ROSS: Actually, I was on leave in California when I got the cable from President Kennedy —I was one of his last appointments—sending me to Bangui. I came up before the Senate, the last man in a group of six that went before the Senate that day. Leading off was Henry Cabot Lodge going to Vietnam, then Admiral Anderson going to Portugal, then a man named Loeb going to Guinea who had been ambassador in Peru. Howard Cottam was on there, going out to Kuwait and Mike Blumenthal who was to be the U.S. trade rep.

So by the time they got to me, I think the committee was tired, and nobody knew where the Central African Republic was, anyway. There was practically nothing addressed to me about that. But they knew I'd been in Guinea, and I guess it was in the light of that fact that they queried me somewhat extensively about it.

Q: You didn't have to tell them the name of the prime minister? (Laughs)

ROSS: No, no. So I went off to Bangui in September 1963.

Q: Had you had a chance to see Kennedy?

ROSS: No, I did not. It was too bad. I had hoped to have it. I can't remember what the problem was now, but I didn't. I had been at post maybe ten days when I got a little note from Kennedy sending me a picture, an autographed photograph, and telling me he'd been sorry not to have had an opportunity to talk with me before I left.

The post, when I got there, was a small one, as you know. I had a DCM, a reporting officer, an admin officer, and PAO. That was about the size of the officer staff. Eventually we got another junior officer. The president then was David Dacko. He was one of the best educated of the Central Africans, and that was not saying an awful lot. He'd never been to university. He'd been to some kind of normal school and had been a teacher under the French administration.

Q: That was a pretty good level.

ROSS: Which wasn't bad. As I say, he certainly was relatively better off than his countrymen. I don't think they had anybody with a university degree at the time of independence. He was related, I think, to Boganda, who had been the leading light in French Equatorial Africa before independence. Had Boganda not died in a plane crash in 1959, just before independence took form in 1960, it's conceivable that the French could have succeeded in bringing French Equatorial Africa into existence as one unit, instead of the four that emerged. In other words, Gabon, Brazza, CAR, and Chad. But after Boganda's death, there was nobody who had that kind of following throughout French Equatorial Africa, so it split up. Of course, once that happened, then the vested interests built up and took over in each of these places, and there was never a chance of getting them back together again.

We had tried, at the outset, to have only one ambassador for all the four, with charg#s in three, and the ambassador resident in Brazzaville. But that didn't last very long. By 1961, John Burns went out to be the first ambassador at CAR, and I followed him. I'd been out there then about two months when Kennedy was assassinated. That, of course,

produced a tremendous reaction in CAR, as it did elsewhere in the world. We had all kinds of messages of sympathy and the country went into mourning for a few days.

Q: You had to be there to imagine how affected they really were.

ROSS: It was a tremendous impact.

Our interests in the CAR at that point were not very large. The French were in there. The country was nominally independent, but you had French advisors in all the ministries, more or less at the ministries' elbow. The French were the ones who were supporting the country financially and with technical assistance, in large measure. Their High Commissioner was automatically Dean of the Diplomatic Corps.

Q: And they didn't want much interference.

ROSS: They were very suspicious of us, thinking we were trying to muscle in and maybe displace them, a view that I was always working to connect. On the contrary, we'd have been delighted to lease it all to them. But we were under some pressure from the CAR to do something, and so we had a minimal program. One thing we did that I think was appreciated was a modest program to help them with road building and road repair. We brought in a team of SEABEES with proper equipment, and then they were to do some of this road-building. In the process they trained the Central Africans in the use of the equipment.

Q: And the basic idea that you need to repair a road.

ROSS: Exactly. That's right. Once you got outside of Bangui, you didn't have to go very far from the center of Bangui to hit the dirt roads. This red laterite develops potholes easily. So we had a modest program with various kinds of equipment here and there. In one or two things we were in cooperation with the Israelis, who had an embassy there. But I

always was very careful about that, because I found out the Israelis tended to depict these projects as being theirs alone.

Q: Did we have any kind of a cultural program? You did have USIA?

ROSS: We had a PAO, so we had a library.

Q: That wasn't enough to worry the French.

ROSS: No. We had leader grantees, a modest few, going to the States. You're talking about four or five individuals a year.

Before I left, not with Dacko, but with [Jean-Bedel] Bokassa later on, I did negotiate a Peace Corps agreement. We did not have a Peace Corps there by the time I left. (I'm really getting ahead of myself, because I wanted to raise this in the context of working with Bokassa).

With Dacko, I had good relations, not terribly close, but quite proper and good relations. I had fairly easy access to him. He had a few people around who weren't terribly friendly to us, and I think some of it was the result of the French. In September of 1965, I had been there just over two years and was thinking that I might be leaving soon because a two-year tour was more or less the normal tour at that time. Then on the 31st of December, 1965, Bokassa pulled a coup d'#tat. He had been the head of the armed forces there.

Q: Wasn't he in some way related to Dacko, too?

ROSS: They were cousins, but somewhat removed. It wasn't a terribly close relationship. He had been head of the armed forces with the rank of major. He had a fairly good career, as Africans go, in the French Army, because he came in as a private and rose to the rank of captain, no mean feat. He had overseas service and all that, but essentially he was not

very well educated. He was cunning, but not all that bright. He was terribly loyal to France, and particularly to [Charles] De Gaulle, whom he called “Papa.”

I must tell this. This was the 31st of December when he pulled the coup d'#tat. A number of us, including the French High Commissioner and his wife and my wife and I and a couple of other chiefs of mission, were all celebrating New Year's Eve at the leading hotel in Bangui, which was owned by a Greek who had became a close friend of ours. We all were having this great party with a few of the local French, too, when we heard firing. We heard these sounds in the distance. We thought of firecrackers, celebrating New Year's Eve. Then we heard more firing, which got a little more persistent, and people began to get a little uneasy. But we really didn't take much notice.

One or two of the French who had left children in town got a little bit antsy and took off. One man who left turned out to be the only European casualty of the coup, killed in cross-fire near the presidential palace. He just happened to be in the line of fire. We didn't know that, of course, until much later.

We were there, continuing our festivities, and it must have been about 1:30 or 2:00 in the morning. Shortly before we were getting ready to break up, here comes this military procession from the center of town, passing on the road which ran right in front of the hotel, in the direction of the Army barracks, in military personnel carriers. In the lead vehicle sitting in the back seat, were Dacko and Bokassa. The car comes abreast of us. We were all out in front of the hotel to watch this go by. I was standing next to the French High Commissioner. Bokassa orders the car to stop, stands up, and yells out, “La revolution a r#ussi! Vive la France!”

I turned to the French High Commissioner and said, “Ah! This is the way it's done, eh?” And the poor man was frightfully embarrassed, because I swear he had no idea what was going on. This was typical Bokassa, you see. Bokassa was just so overjoyed, and he had

this close connection with France, and that just came naturally: “Vive la France!” So there we were.

Before the year was out, however, the French High Commissioner PNGed. It didn't come to a formal action, but he had to leave. He and Bokassa never got along well.

I had good relations with Bokassa, but it was not the kind of thing you could depend on, because he was terribly unreliable and unpredictable.

Q: And a megalomaniac?

ROSS: That developed afterwards. When he first came in, he was quite diffident in some respects, but the problem was that you couldn't pin him down, because he was always influenced by the last guy who talked to him. So you never were sure that you had something going.

This Peace Corps agreement, for example, that we negotiated in 1966, and had been a long process, we finally got it nailed down by negotiation in Bangui It was effected by exchange of notes in Bangui with the Central African Government. That thing was only about a few weeks old, when one day I got a note from the Foreign Office wanting to cancel it. I thought, “What's this?” So I go poking around and find out that, reportedly, Bokassa was upset because our air attach# based in Chad had inadvertently given a ride to an American Peace Corps volunteer who was coming through the country—gave him a ride from Bangui to a place called Bouar, in the northwest of the country, where there was a Central African Army base. I think the French also had some of their force de frappe stationed there. Bokassa took umbrage at the air attach# because he'd done it for the Peace Corps guy without asking permission or letting anybody know. The Peace Corps volunteer was passing through; he was a tourist, in effect.

Eventually I asked to see Bokassa and I took the tack that I supposed he didn't know about the foreign office note. Then I explained the circumstances of what had happened

and all, that this was perfectly innocent, our air attach# giving a fellow American a ride on his way home to wherever he was stationed in west Africa.

Eventually, I got him quieted down, and that was the end of it. But this was the kind of thing that could occur. In some of his entourage he had people who were all too happy to do that kind of thing. It may very well have been that Bokassa didn't really know what was going on, but anyway, that was a useful ploy, I thought, and it worked.

One of the first things he did when he came in, which gave him good points with us and for which he might have expected more recognition in a concrete way, was to break relations with Communist China. Dacko had recognized Communist China shortly after I came there, and I had to help the Nationalist Chinese leave. He just broke relations and suddenly they had to go, and we helped them leave, helped them ship effects and all that kind of thing.

Then Bokassa came in, and the Communist Chinese were out within four days. Nationalist Chinese were back in. He was anti-communist, having seen military service in Southeast Asia. So that, of course, was well received in Washington, and I think Bokassa thought he was going to get a substantially greater increase in foreign aid from us than eventuated.

One practice that was initiated while I was in Bangui the last couple of years might be worth mentioning. My colleagues in the other parts of the old French Equatorial Africa—in the Chad and in Gabon (not in Congo-Brazzaville where we had closed the Embassy in 1965) and I got together with our colleague in Cameroon in several mini-chiefs of missions' conferences on our own. It was very useful to get together and talk about our mutual problems and our methods of doing things.

Q: We did that in Eastern Europe occasionally, too.

ROSS: We came up with a report to the Department on what we had said and done and with any recommendations that had been developed during the three or four days that we spent together.

I had one very unhappy duty while in Bangui—telling a missionary fritud of the death of her husband and how he died. I happened to be in Europe on R and R, when things started to deteriorate rapidly in the area around Stanleyville. When I got to Rome I went in to the Embassy to see if the Department wanted me to return to post. I'd only been out a few days. The first thing I did was to run into Mike Gannett who said Meloy, the DCM, was looking for me. Meloy told me that my mother-in-law had just died, and they were trying to reach me. So Andrea and the boys left me the next morning and flew over the Pole to Los Angeles, and I proceeded to drive to Paris quickly to get rid of the rental car we had and fly back to Bangui.

Because of the troubles we were in contact with American missionaries in the eastern part of the Congo around Stanleyville, and there was one man named Carlson whom we tried and tried and tried to leave his mission station and come out. His family came out, but we couldn't get him out. Eventually, one of the guerrilla groups overran the mission station and took him into Stanleyville, where he was detained in stockade or something. Then the Belgian paratroopers flew in and landed in Stanleyville, and took over the town. In the course of the fighting, Carlson tried to get out of the stockade, and was shot going over the wall.

Q: Bangui was the evacuation point?

ROSS: It was the evacuation point. We shared a common river border with the Congo, and so for that eastern part of the Congo, particularly the area around Stanleyville, that was the natural and quickest way out across the river.

Q: Although it is quite a ways from Stanleyville.

ROSS: Yes, not close.

Q: Was there anything else of major importance that occurred there at that time?

ROSS: I reserve the right to add something later.

Q: By all means, yes.

ROSS: There may be other things.

Q: By all means.

ROSS: Shortly before the Chiefs of Missions Conference in Tangier in January 1967. I thought I was going to Madagascar. I understand that my nomination had gotten as far as President Johnson's desk, when he received a call from an old friend who had just lost a congressional election in Utah and needed a job. First thing you know, this man was going to Madagascar. That was all right as far as I was concerned. I would have gone to Madagascar, but that would have been too much of the same kind of thing, really.

After attending the Tangier chief of mission conference, there was reason to believe I was going to Cameroon, again a bit more of the same, but a little more important. But then one day, my code clerk came in waving a telegram. It was the drop copy of a cable that had gone out asking for agr#ment for me as ambassador to Haiti! That was the first I had known about it. Half an hour later, another cable came in from the Director General, apologizing for not having been able to let me know beforehand that things had reached this point, and asking if I have any objection to going.

Q: You couldn't very well say no.

ROSS: No. I was delighted at the prospect, because it was, in many ways, a more important assignment. It was closer to home. At the same time, it was an interesting Post,

as I found when I got there, and had one of the best embassy residences in the entire Foreign Service.

Q: It's a lovely country.

ROSS: It's a poor country and in some ways it's in a shambles. It's been deforested, and in the rainy season, all the top soil gets washed down into the sea. There are really raging torrents running down through Port au Prince. I'd only been there a few months when a young Brazilian who was I think, vice consul in Los Angeles, came down to take charge between ambassadors. We had one of these torrential rains, when he was out in his car. He arrived at a bridge over one of the large ravines, and he saw he couldn't cross it, because there was a tremendous flow of water coming over it. But out on the bridge in a Volkswagen Beetle was a Haitian woman, and she panicked. Instead of staying in the car and maybe opening two windows and doors so the water would run through, she got out of the car. As she was being washed over the side, he rushed to help her, and the two of them were carried over, down the gullies, out through all kinds of drainage pipes. We found the bodies in the sea the next day. It was terrible. But that was the kind of thing that could happen in the rainy season, when you had this great amount of water coming down.

There would be water in the street in front of the Embassy. My Embassy limousine was a big old black Checker with a high wheel base, and I could get through it, but nobody else could.

Q: You would also get in with a top hat on.

ROSS: I certainly could, and it had jump seats and lots of room, you know.

Q: But it wasn't very pretty.

ROSS: I had a chauffeur, a very dark Haitian, with the unlikely Haitian name of Waldemar Ulbnick. Haiti was a challenging assignment. I went out there with instructions to maintain correct but cool relations.

Q: This was Papa Doc?

ROSS: This was Papa Doc. Our relations were really sort of in neutral—low ebb, anyway. He had PNGed Gerry Drew in 1960 and I don't think Robert Newbegin was there very long. In 1963 he PNGed Ray Thurston.

Q: Was Lane Timmons there?

ROSS: Timmons was my immediate predecessor, and he was there for a couple of years. I gather I was sent there because they needed a change of ambassadors, because morale was very low.

Q: Lane could be quite difficult.

ROSS: Yes. I had never met him until I met him in Washington on my way to Haiti. He was very good at briefing me. He was an excellent officer, but I guess what we now call interpersonal relationships . . .

Q: He was a perfectionist and a workaholic.

ROSS: I didn't know all of this at the time. This I was told later. But morale was bad when I got there. We worked on it. I just escaped being PNG myself, although I had good relations. Papa Doc, for some reason, decided he liked me, and I always used to say, “God, I wonder what I'm doing wrong?” (Laughs) But this was on a purely personal level, because I avoided, as much as possible, official contact—that is to say, any one-on-one meetings, because I knew that any of those was going to be the occasion of his asking me for something that we weren't going to give him. So normally I would go only when I was

instructed by my government, which wasn't all that often, for the same reasons, or when he called me in.

It was in these sessions that I learned early on how closely he kept watch on everything that was going on in the country. I mean literally. Nothing could happen that he didn't know about. Somebody could be washed ashore or landed ashore anywhere, and within a matter of hours, Papa Doc would know about it, because this guy, or whoever it was, would run into some Haitian who had never seen him before, a stranger. The bush telegraph would start operating, and the first thing you know, it would get back to the president.

I'd go in, and he would always ask me about my wife. Her first name is Antigone, and old Papa Doc fancied himself as a great scholar and classicist, and he loved this name Antigone. “Eh, Antigone, comment va-t-elle?” Sometimes he'd reach in the drawer and pull out a series of photographs taken at some party we'd been at the night before, you know, dancing up a storm at the Dominican Embassy or whatever. So he really knew what was going on there. As I say, nothing happened that he didn't know about.

Of course, one of the consequences of this was that personal security was great. Our secretaries could have walked home at midnight without any fear of molestation. You had to go next door to Jamaica to be mugged or raped or whatever. Partly, I suppose, it was because the Haitians didn't have any colonial hangups. They were, after all, the second independent republic in the Western Hemisphere. They had been ruling themselves—not very well, it must be admitted—but they had been ruling themselves all this time. So they didn't have that kind of colonial hangup that existed particularly in the British colonies.

Q: Like Cuba, I guess.

ROSS: Yes. We had a minimal aid program there. We had suspended our aid program about the time that Thurston was there, because we found that funds were being diverted from aid projects and equipment was being used for things that they weren't sent down

there for. So we stopped all of that, including work done on the Peligre dam, to electrify it. Thereafter we had a minimal program.

Our chief thing, which brought in about a million dollars a year to the country, was a program to eradicate malaria. We paid for people to go out in teams to spray everything in sight to eradicate the mosquito. There we kept our hands on the money pretty much, so that we were sure it was being used for the purpose intended, and that it did go into the economy. A million dollars was substantial input to a country where the fiscal revenue might not have been more than about $30 million a year.

That's another point, of course. At least 40% of the revenues were siphoned off. They'd go to Papa Doc. He had something called the R#gie du Tabac, the tobacco monopoly, really. It collected from all kinds of things, and the money that went into the R#gie never got into the regular budget.

Q: That was his own personal money?

ROSS: He used it for all kinds of private things, you see, and this, of course, drove the IMF up the wall. They had a representative there part of the time when I was there, an Argentinian, a very nice chap and able, I think, who tried to get some order into things. The man who was, in effect, their Secretary of the Treasury, the chief financial man, had a way to keep himself covered and in office and protected. He squirreled a lot of money away in I don't know how many bank accounts in the United States. He was the only one who knew where it was. So they had to keep him alive if they ever wanted to get this money. But that was the kind of financial situations that prevailed.

Q: Did the Duvaliers actually squirrel away as much personally?

ROSS: They were certainly thought to have squirreled away a lot, since they had access to all this money that wasn't being used for real budgetary purposes. So it was generally thought that they had bank accounts in the States and in Switzerland. Not to the extent

or the degree, I think, that was later the case under Baby Doc, but then, of course, by the time he was in office, or after he was in office, aid programs began to increase in size, so there was more of it siphoned off in various ways.

Q: You said one thing that fascinated me, and that was that they didn't have a colonial mentality, and yet, for cripe's sake, we had Marines in there for 25 or 30 years.

ROSS: That's right, we did. But you see, they'd been gone since 1934, and one might have thought that an American administration there that long would have worked some permanent change, but, in fact, it didn't. We weren't in there long enough for a whole generation to have been raised and educated under American tutelage, if you will. All the old politicos came back in again when we left, and reverted to their old ways of doing things. We did keep somebody in there for a while, controlling finances, but then he left, too.

Q: But you didn't have an anti-American bias, particularly, because of that?

ROSS: Not really. The American ambassador was proconsul. It's not a role that we sought out, but that was it. To get back to what we were saying a little earlier, the Latin ambassadors all came around to me. I spent a lot of time talking to them, telling them what I thought of the situation and what was going on, or how we looked at this or that. Once in a while they'd have an input of some use, but a lot of them didn't. We had some Latin ambassadors there who didn't speak French. Fortunately that wasn't as much of a handicap as it might have been, because all of the top layer in the Foreign Office spoke Spanish probably as well as they spoke French. However, I was surprised to see that some Latin countries would send ambassadors who had no knowledge of French.

My last comment on Haiti is the visit of Nelson Rockefeller there in July of 1969, which went well. It was a one-day visit. It was difficult to keep him on schedule. A lot of advance preparation had been required, and I was in close contact with the Foreign Office and other agencies of the government there in preparation. It did go reasonably well, except

that we had a hard time keeping him on schedule, because he was seemingly more interested in shopping for objects d'art. He had a great acquisitiveness, you know. He'd buy up all kinds of things.

Q: Was this an official visit?

ROSS: Yes. It was the last of the several swings that he made through Latin America, and Haiti was one of the last countries he visited. With Papa Doc still in power the White House wasn't all that enthusiastic about it. But Haiti couldn't very well be left out, so there was this one-day overnight visit.

Q: This was the beginning of the Nixon Administration?

ROSS: Yes. This was July of 1969. I took Rockefeller around to call on Papa Doc, which he couldn't very well avoid doing. But Rockefeller didn't want me in the meeting, so I absented myself after making the introductions. At the end of the meeting, Papa Doc led him out onto the balcony, presumably to look at the view, but anyway, somebody took a picture of the two of them. I can't remember now if they were shaking hands, but they were standing side by side. That hit the papers in the States, with some adverse comment, as I recall. But the Vice President couldn't come to the country without seeing Papa Doc. He did have a session with key members of the Cabinet, as well, to which he arrived late. He was with my wife, running around, buying up things. She kept trying to get him to move on. She knew what the schedule was, and she had one of his own people in the car, too, with them. Every time they'd stop, he'd come to her and say, “Can't you do something?” Rockefeller finally made it, but it got to be a little dicey before he turned up. We were all squirming. That was one of the last events before I left Haiti.

Several weeks later I got a call from John Burns, who had just left Tanzania and was now Director General, asking me if I would go to Tanzania.

Q: That was the second time he'd called.

ROSS: Yes. I must say in all fairness, I wasn't that keen about it. I had rather hoped at that stage to go to another Latin American assignment at a larger embassy. As it turned out, there was one in the works that I didn't know about until I got back to Washington. I got there to sit on a selection board in August or September of 1969, and the ARA executive director, Findley Burns, said, “You know, Secretary Meyer wants to send you to Venezuela. Would you have any objection?”

I said, “No. I told John I would go to Tanzania, but sure, if Meyer wants me to go to Venezuela, of course.” It's a class-one embassy. Maurice Bernbaum had come out sometime earlier. He'd come out through Haiti, and I'd seen him. I didn't know anything about this until Findley Burns tried it out on me.

Anyway, they sent the Under Secretary, to the White House, to see if they could undo what had been done regarding Tanzania and put me in for Venezuela.

Q: I think it was probably Elliot Richardson.

ROSS: It might very well have been. Maybe it was Elliot. Anyway, no go. Over there they said, “No, we've already processed it for Tanzania, so that's where he's going to go.” So that's where I went.

Q: That was a hell of a big country, but also another difficult one.

ROSS: As I found out later, Venezuela might have been offered to me earlier on, but they had tried originally to send Ambassador Hurd there, and then it was discovered, belatedly, that he had all of those oil company connections. So his nomination was withdrawn. When I didn't go, Rob McClintock eventually did.

I went to Tanzania and President Nyerere. That was an interesting experience, I must say.

Q: He's always been a fascinating person.

ROSS: He was fascinating. There again, I had a very good personal relationship with him, although there were some issues on which we were on opposite sides of the fence. Vietnam was at its height then, and we were on opposite sides of that. He didn't think we were moving fast enough or firmly enough in Southern Africa to work changes in South Africa or in the Portuguese territories. Then, of course, as you know, he was a Fabian Socialist and had his own ideas about how the Tanzanian economy should develop. That didn't keep him from accepting a substantial amount of aid from us, and that aid being used fairly well. On the fiscal side, there was very good accountability, because they had a Tanzanian, an Indian who had been born in Tanzania, as their Minister of Finance. He was very good and had very good standing in the international financial community, which helped them out over a long period, when otherwise they might not have had as much.

Q: Did the Indians have the same trouble there that they had in other parts?

ROSS: It came before I left. It started coming in 1971, I guess. Yes, they changed a lot of the local laws. You couldn't own rental property after a while. If you lived in it, okay. But you couldn't have apartment houses or apartments for rent, etc. Also they clamped down on foreign exchange available for Tanzanian children to go abroad for study. Lots of the Indians, the ones who could afford it, had sent theirs to Britain or elsewhere.

Q: Ambassador Ross, we were talking about the problem of the Indians, particularly in Tanzania.

ROSS: As I say, there were a number of measures that were, on the face of them, not discriminatory, but in the practical effect, only affected the Indian element of the population. So these people began pulling up and going out, and in the process, the Tanzanians lost a very productive element of their population—doctors, for example, merchants of one kind or another—because most of the merchants were Indian.

Q: In fact, it was the middle class, almost.

ROSS: That's right. There were some relatively well-to-do Tanzanians, particularly up in the north in the coffee areas.

Q: Probably more in Tanzania than Uganda?

ROSS: I don't know. I really don't know. There were a few Africans, but not very many. Of course, the whole thrust of Nyerere's policies was to make a kind of classless society, and he used this device of Ujama villages, where he hoped he was going to be able to develop centers of productivity throughout the country, establishing villages where, in effect, everybody worked for the common cause, and at the end of the harvest season, you all shared and shared alike, that kind of thing. Well, that didn't go very well, because, as you might suppose, there were those who worked very hard and those who sat around. Obviously, they weren't about to share equally when that kind of thing existed. He tried, too, to convert to Ujama some things like coffee-producing areas, which would have been a real disaster.

He decided he wanted to move the capital out of Dar es Salaam to a place called Dodoma, in the middle of the country. He wanted to have a more centrally located place, and I think to get the government away from whatever foreign influence that came from being on the coast. They still haven't achieved this, although I gather technically the move is still on the books. It was obvious that there were going to be all kinds of problems.

I went up to Dodoma and there wasn't any water there. I mean, it was a very dry part of the country, and one wondered how you were going to support any kind of a population or put the capital there with all that entailed. That was just one overriding problem. But he was full of good intentions and personally the epitome of integrity. I don't think any kind of financial scandal was ever attached to him.

Q: And a man you could talk to.

ROSS: Oh, yes, yes.

Q: You might not reach any conclusion, but you could talk.

ROSS: That's right. But he was a very interesting man, very articulate, you know, and had a better education. He'd gone to Edinburgh and had advanced training, not a doctorate, but advanced training, and I think it during his British sojourn that he came under the influence of Fabian socialists and took a turn in that direction.

Q: Was his advanced training in economics?

ROSS: I can't remember whether it was that or in the education field. Because he was a teacher. The Tanzanians all called him, in Swahili, Mwalimu, which means “teacher.” That's what he was early on.

Q: What did we have there basically in the way of programs? Did we have a Peace Corps there?

ROSS: We did not have a Peace Corps there.

Q: At no time?

ROSS: No. We had had a Peace Corps, and it had been pulled out at the request of the Tanzanian Government the year before I was posted there. I think it was late 1968 or early 1969. It was not reinstated in my day. There again, you know, the idea being, I guess, that there was too much American influence out in the countryside.

Q: Corruption?

ROSS: That's right. I was there at the time when, back here in the States, Afro hairdos were in style and things like that. Nyerere wouldn't have any of it. No Afro hairdos in Tanzania. There were several other things which he just didn't want.

Q: He was a conservative?

ROSS: Yes. He wanted to keep his people free from this. But it was a fascinating place, and the relationship between Tanganyika and Zanzibar was an interesting one, because we had two vice presidents one from Zanzibar and one from Tanganyika. The vice president from Zanzibar who was assassinated shortly before I left, a man named Karume, was, in effect, the dictator of Zanzibar. Zanzibar was a big foreign exchange earner for Tanzania, because it is an island that grows cloves.

Q: And other spices.

ROSS: Other spices, too, but cloves are the big crop, both on Zanzibar proper and on Pemba, which is part of the Zanzibar geographical entity. However, under Karume those revenues were kept by the Zanzibaris for their own use. They didn't come over as part of the total Tanzanian revenue. I think eventually this may have changed, but in my day it didn't.

Q: In other words, they ran their own foreign exchange.

ROSS: Yes, and they had, as a carryover from the time they were independent before the union with Tanzania, consular posts there that Nyerere might not have authorized. The East Germans were there, the Czechs were there, etc. They gave assistance directly to the Zanzibaris without going through the Tanzanian apparatus. I don't think that sat terribly well, but I guess there were limits on what Nyerere could do.

Q: You said that he might not otherwise have authorized these things. Was he that strong a leader?

ROSS: I think he would want to keep control of this, you see. We had a consulate there, a holdover from the old days, too. The Brits no longer had a resident consul there but the

British High Commissioner used to visit periodically. I don't recall that otherwise there was much in the way of a Western presence there on Zanzibar.

Q: I never got into Tanzania at all when I was there, because there was always friction between Kenya and Tanzania.

ROSS: Yes. They broke up their common market.

Q: Common services.

ROSS: Yes. East African common services.

Q: That happened while I was there, and it was a great loss, I think.

ROSS: It was. That happened while I was there, too, the termination of one common service and then another.

Q: The Ugandans got out very early, I think.

ROSS: Yes.

Q: That was a great loss, because that was a good operating thing.

ROSS: It was. Yes, they had a lot of good things.

Q: Of course, it was something installed by the British.

ROSS: It was. It did tend to work much more efficiently than three separate entities would and probably less costly.

Q: The currency was an important thing, too.

ROSS: That's right, as we've had occasion to note in other places, the various vested interests in a country.

Q: I think it was each one with national pride.

ROSS: That's it.

Q: And the fact that Kenya was going well economically.

ROSS: Yes. It was always a point of great resentment and dissatisfaction among the Tanzanians that all of the safaris from Europe and America and elsewhere came into Nairobi and then fanned out from there.

Q: They collected much of the foreign exchange.

ROSS: That's right. Even to the point, you see, that the people on safari didn't know when they were in Tanzania. As you say, most of it was collected by the tour groups that were either headquartered abroad or in Nairobi. So that was another reason for the dissatisfaction. But I must say, when the Tanzanians were handling it themselves, they never succeeded in really accomplishing a great improvement in the situation, at least during the time I was there. They would get tour groups, but they were all pre-paid, pre-packaged tour groups, so that the individuals who came would go to one of the beach resorts near Dar es Salaam. They might come into town once or twice, but for the most part, they were out there. It was all pre-paid. They spent very little money in the country.

Q: The hotel bills and so on, which were group rates.

ROSS: Exactly. So one wonders. They had a few souvenirs that they may have bought, but one wonders how much the Tanzanians did get out of it.

Q: What were their principal sources of revenue and foreign exchange besides the spices?

ROSS: There were the spices, there was tourism, and there were some gemstones. Just before I went out there, as a matter of fact, a stone called Tanzanite came on the market, a blue stone, semi-precious, really, which Tiffany's had the lock on. As I remember, when I went out through New York, I went to Tiffany's to see this. But Tanzania didn't have alluvial diamond fields as they did in the Central African Republic. That was one of the American interests there. In Tanzania, diamonds were found in “pipes” as they are in South Africa. In Tanzania they weren't all that extensive or important. Sisal and cotton had been important, but the markets for these had slumped as I knew from Haiti. For a little while, it looked like sisal might come back. Remember paper dresses? We had a period for things like that. But that never really developed. Coffee and tea were other foreign-exchange earners. The tea was in British hands on southern highlands, British companies.

Q: Was there any great American commercial penetration?

ROSS: No, not a great deal.

Q: My experience is that eastern Africa is just too darn far away.

ROSS: That's right. Then you ran into all kinds of difficulties. For a time the Lykes Lines used to come in, you know, and then they stopped, because the port was so congested that you'd have to stand off maybe for two weeks. What American freighter could do that? I think they were figuring it might be something like $30,000 a day. They weren't about to stand for that. So we stopped having American bottoms turn up there. I only got one American naval vessel there, and that was near the end of my tour. We got one of them from the force in the Persian gulf, a destroyer. That took a lot of doing. It went off all right, no harm done. The U.S. Navy were very keen on doing it. They were always looking for ports of call.

Q: I had a very dichotomous attitude on that where we were, but I had them come in, and it worked all right.

ROSS: I had an unfortunate experience in that regard in Guinea, which I neglected to touch upon, which perhaps I'll add later on. I wasn't all that keen to have them come in, in the face of what I could see was, at best, a lukewarm attitude.

Tanzania, as you know, has Mozambique on its southern border, and Dar es Salaam was the center from which Eduardo Mondlane, the head of Frelimo the Mozambican independence movement, operated. He was married to an American. He was assassinated shortly before I got there, but the Mozambicans were a presence there, as were, of course, groups from Rhodesia and South Africa.

Q: What was the relationship with Malawi? Was that significant?

ROSS: Not really. I think the Tanzanians all thought that Banda was a bit of an Uncle Tom. Relationships were all right. They shared the lake together, you know.

Q: And the transportation came through, I suppose, to Dar es Salaam, didn't it?

ROSS: Not really, no. A lot of things from Zambia came through, yes, but not from Malawi. That was one reason that the Tanzanians got the Chinese in there to build that railroad to Zambia. They were hoping to eliminate Zambia's having to use the railroad that ran through Rhodesia and Mozambique. The Chinese came and built the railroad. There was great suspicion and fear in Washington that the Chinese would never leave, having come in. I was at considerable pains to try to get some sense of balance on that question in my reporting, because we could find no evidence of this, or that the Chinese were having much of an impact on the Tanzanians. I'm sure they were grateful for the assistance, yes, but the Chinese weren't imparting any particular political philosophy, and certainly not any work habits, on the Tanzanians. The Tanzanians were quite prepared to sit there and watch the Chinese work, but they weren't about to work the way these coolies were working on the railroad.

Q: You couldn't say that we did anything except have the Chinese build our railroads across the country anyway.

ROSS: Yes. We were engaged in road building. That is to say, we had an American Company called Nello Teer, building a road from Dar es Salaam to Morogoro.

Q: Was this an actual paved road?

ROSS: It was to be.

Q: Our road building in Somalia was mostly what they called "stabilized earth," which you mixed a little cement in with the soil.

ROSS: Yes. They weren't finished by the time I left, so I don't know how it all turned out. But the first stages were paved. Incidentally, it might interest you to know that one of the other road-building outfits in Tanzania, particularly in the north of Tanzania, was the Frederics Company, owned by in-laws of Henry Tasea. They were also involved in building the international airport that was put up between Arusha and Moshi in the north, presumably for travelers to come in and go directly into the game areas of Tanzania. Whether that ever worked out or not, I don't know. Shortly before I left Tanzania, I went to the inauguration of the airport. But up to the time I left, there was very little traffic in and out, and I don't know if there were any scheduled flights.

Q: Does that pretty well wind up Tanzania?

ROSS: I think so. When I knew that I was coming out, there was that chiefs of mission conference in Addis shortly before, in April of 1972, and David Newsom asked me if I would come in to be the senior deputy of the bureau. In anticipation of that, after that conference, I went first to Morocco to visit my son. Andrea went with me.

Then I went up to Lisbon, took a plane, and flew from Lisbon to Luanda and did a tour of Southern Africa, in preparation for my Departmental job. I went to Angola first and flew to South Africa—Pretoria, Johannesburg, Durban, and Cape Town. In Cape Town I had an hour's conversation with Forster, one on one, in the course of which his comments and attitude showed me how intractable the South African stand on apartheid really was. I then went to three former High Commission territories—Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland, and to Mozambique. It was all extremely useful.

When I got to Washington, Rogers was still secretary. I think we probably got a little more attention in the African bureau from him than we subsequently did from Kissinger, except perhaps as South African questions came up. We got his attention for them, but not for run-of-the-mill African things. For a few things in North Africa, yes. We still had the office of North African Affairs in the African Bureau and we were negotiating liquid-gas contracts with Algeria, which the seventh floor was interested in. But in general, we didn't receive a great deal of interest in the day-to-day operations.

One big problem that we had was the Ugandan flap when Idi Amin was there causing all that trouble. We pulled our Ambassador out and Bob Keeley ended up being charg#. Then it became a question of whether we were going to leave anybody in or whether we were going to wind up the operation.

Q: In fact, we did wind it up for a while.

ROSS: Yes, we did. So a lot of my personal attention was devoted to that.

Q: Was Dave assistant secretary then?

ROSS: Dave was assistant secretary for nearly the whole time I was there. He left in early January of 1974, and then I was acting assistant secretary until Easum took over.

On a personal note, earlier than that, along about June or July of 1973, Rogers sent my nomination to the White House to be ambassador to Argentina, which, of course, I would have been delighted to accept, although it was kind of a dicey situation there from the standpoint of security, but extremely interesting with Peron's widow Isabel as President at that point. The problem turned out to be that initially the Department couldn't get John Davis Lodge to leave Buenos Aires. So the nomination sort of sat around and sat around. Meanwhile, the White House started looking around for a political appointee.

Then before any action was taken, while my nomination was still there, Rogers resigned. Kissinger came in, and, of course, all nominations went back to square one, and mine never resurfaced again. Eventually, they sent Ambassador Hill to Argentina.

Q: If ever two guys deserved each other, it was Hill and Lodge. I had to try to manage Lodge when he was in Spain. (Laughs)

ROSS: After that I still thought I might be going out. I was acting assistant secretary until Easum came in, and I think the seventh floor knew I was available. They eventually offered me a post which I will not name, but which I did not want. By that time there were probably only eight or ten posts in the Service that I really would have been very interested in, and I didn't count among them things like Paris or London, by any means, but there were a some in Latin America and North Africa and then there was Greece.

Q: After you've lived in a few places like Bangui . . .

ROSS: That's right. I'd had my fill of tropical assignments, more than my fill, and also of newly emerging countries, newly developed countries. I was hoping for a change. Anyway, I decided that that was a good time to retire while things were still on the upswing.

Q: You and I got out in about the same frame of mind.

ROSS: I must say I had absolutely no regrets about having retired when I did. As you probably know, I wasn't retired very long when I got called back by the Inspector General and the Director General to do some inspecting, starting out with a sensitive one. This is how they got me to do it, because normally I probably wouldn't have. I had shied away from the function while I was on active duty, thinking I wouldn't like it. But they talked me into this because they wanted somebody like me no longer actively in the system, but who knew the system and was able to do this sensitive one. I wasn't worrying about a next assignment or anything like that. So I did the inspection and it was on Embassy Managua and Turner Shelton.

Q: My God, he was number two in Budapest for months.

ROSS: We were terribly surprised when he surfaced in Nicaragua, because he had been consul general in Nassau while I was in Haiti, and I used to read the stuff that was coming out of there. He was then class two, and he should have been selected out for time in class, but he was close to several senators, I think, and also to the President.

Q: That's right.

ROSS: Nixon and Rebozo used to come down to Nassau where Shelton made himself useful. So he surfaced in Nicaragua. Well, I did this inspection, and the Department was pleased with it. It didn't result in much in the way of action. I think it did put into focus some of the reporting and the personnel situation at post, that kind of thing, but the Department was going in two different directions at once. They counted on the Nicaraguan vote in the United Nations, and they wanted somebody who could go in and talk to Somoza right away and be sure that telegraphic instructions to the Nicaraguan delegation were going to be forthcoming, etc. But on the other hand, Shelton was supposed to keep backing away.

Q: You're not supposed to go to bed with them.

ROSS: That's right. I think that psychologically and philosophically, Turner was very close to Somoza's frame of mind, so they got on famously. As you say, he was much closer than the Department was happy with, but on the other hand, they didn't hesitate to use him and ask him to do these things, which required him being able to pop in on Somoza whenever the Department wished it. So they were really wanting him both ways, a point which I made in my report. (Laughs)

Q: Turner was not a man without ability.

ROSS: You're right.

Q: He had great ability. He was just sort of repulsive. (Laughs) Personally repulsive. In his habits, he was kind of an Armenian rug merchant kind of man.

ROSS: He had an unhappy staff. I don't think that was any surprise or any secret.

But in the course of all this, I discovered that I rather enjoyed inspecting, and so I went on to do a series of them for the next 12 years.

Q: Are there any highlights of that?

ROSS: The next one was Colombia, when Pete Vaky was there, and there were no particular problems. That was a routine inspection. The next one was Iran, under Helms. That was a very interesting one for reasons I'm afraid I can't go into here in this interview. But we did come out rather concerned. I must say that there was no indication from anything that we heard while I was there that we were going to have flak from the religious leaders. But you could see that we were in there in such great numbers that we were going to have an adverse impact on our relations with the Iranian public. There were too many people coming in too fast, people who were really not equipped, I think, to deal with the cultural shocks and changes. So you could see where the friction would begin to arise.

Q: What is your general comment about the effectiveness of the inspection system in those days? Do you feel it worked well, as well as it reasonably could in the real world?

ROSS: Yes, I thought so. I think that we did it in a very objective and even-handed way. We did not go around white-washing our colleagues where they were out of line. This was a conduct of relations inspection which we did in Tehran, my first one. I had done the last two in Managua and Bogot# under the old system. A couple of other people had already done conduct of relations inspections elsewhere.

Q: I'm not familiar with that at all.

ROSS: We were looking at policy, you see. We had to ascertain what was the policy and what instructions had gone to the field. Then did the staff in the field understand the policy? What resources had we to implement it, how was it being implemented, how could it be improved, strengthened, or diminished, as the case might be? So our focus was on policy and all the attendant questions. At the same time we started to drop some things. I think maybe a little later we dropped writing efficiency reports on all Americans, because that was not really necessary. We continued to interview all Americans, but only in those cases where we found there might be a reason for an efficiency report, would we write one to rectify some injustice or omission.

Q: This sounds like a much more profound and worthwhile inspection than any that I ever had done on me.

ROSS: I thought that the conduct of relations inspections had the proper focus, and I think we still do it more or less the same way. I'm not really up to date on changes, because the last full-dress inspection I did was John Gavin in Mexico City in 1982. After that, I went out troubleshooting, focusing on one problem or a group of problems in a particular functional area or very sensitive personnel matters. I did one kind of crash security inspection in

Guatemala, to see whether our security measures there were sufficient, and whether we ought to reduce staff. This was during a period of some tension.

Q: Fred Chapin was later doing some of this sort of thing.

ROSS: Chapin was in Washington when I inspected Guatunda.

Q: He's having his troubles now.

ROSS: I know. He's retired. I haven't seen him for a month or two.

I never got back to Africa in all this time, except once. I went to the Chad in 1979, when N'Djamena, the capital, was being shot up by three contending groups. I went in for just a week to talk to everybody and see whether we could properly function in that kind of a situation, what we could do, if anything, and what staff we would need if we were going to stay there.

Q: You were probably all the better not to go into Africa. You had seen a good deal of that. One of the joys of inspecting was that you had seen parts of the world a short enough time so that you weren't bogged down in it.

ROSS: Right.

Q: One thing that we get interesting views on, which is a little difficult for us to do on an unclassified basis, but still you can talk in broad philosophical terms. That is relationships with other agencies. The first that comes to mind is the CIA and what your feelings are about that.

ROSS: Of course, as chief of section in a couple of posts, I had them.

Q: Most posts had somebody around.

ROSS: Nominally I had people working under me, and occasionally the relationship would work out to the point where I could actually get some regular reporting out of them, which was useful. They would take some guidance for that purpose.

Q: Mostly in a small post, they're pretty good.

ROSS: They were already in Guinea when I got there, so the question didn't arise. I must say the people we had were okay. Is this all right?

Q: We have to be a little careful with this.

ROSS: In my first ambassadorial assignment, I resisted attempts to station anybody there, but when the government recognized communist China and we had communist Chinese coming in—we, of course, already had the Soviets—I acquiesced with great reluctance and all kinds of qualifications. It's such a small place, you know, that the chances are that somebody like that would not be long in being recognized. Even when we didn't have anybody there, the French community picked on one of my officers and decided he had to be it, you know. So there was that kind of a background. I had a couple—I won't say at what posts—that were pretty weird. At one post I had to get rid of one couple. Some of them were very good.

Q: Did you generally have any worries about being in control of a relationship?

ROSS: You never knew.

Q: I think this may have been a problem in Tehran, for example. I'm talking about way back.

ROSS: Yes. At the time of my inspection, of course, Helms was Ambassador there.

Q: But the question is, I think operational channels and information channels, both, it's a rather complicated problem.

ROSS: It is.

Q: I've had a great deal to do with them over the years, and on the whole, I've been in favor of it if you have a good relationship.

ROSS: Yes, within limits. I certainly thought that the intelligence-gathering aspect of it was something that had to be done. On the other functions, I was very hesitant.

Q: I see that in most of your posts, you didn't have military. You did have some. You must have had some military people.

ROSS: You mean where I was chief of mission?

Q: Yes.

ROSS: I had none in Bangui. I had some in Haiti, yes. I had none in Tanzania.

Q: None in Tanzania?

ROSS: None.

Q: I would have thought maybe the Navy would have tried to put something there.

ROSS: No, we didn't have any attach#s there.

Q: I had an Army attach# in Somalia.

ROSS: We didn't have any attach#s or Marine guards in Bangui or in Tanzania. In Haiti, I had a resident Army attach#, and the Navy and air attach#s came out of Caracas and visited us periodically. But, of course, we had a close relationship with the Navy in Haiti,

because they had a weekly flight out of Guant#namo to Haiti to give enlisted men and officers, particularly enlisted men, R and R. They came over and spent the day and went to all the wrong places. (Laughs) Then went back by the same plane. But it worked well because it gave us access to the PX in Guant#namo. And once the flight was a lifesaver, because my wife had acute appendicitis and we were able to get her to Guant#namo in time to save her even though her appendix had burst.

Q: This was in Haiti?

ROSS: In Port-au-Prince. It just happened to coincide with the arrival of one of these planes in early morning to let off the load of enlisted men. We got her on the plane, flew her over there, rushed her into the hospital, they took one look and sure enough, she had a burst appendix, on the way to peritonitis. They operated and did a good job.

Q: This was in Guant#namo?

ROSS: Yes, they had a hospital. That was a big operation there.

Q: It still is, I guess.

ROSS: Still is. We're still in there for the moment.

Q: Do you have any comments on relationships that affect an embassy, between different departments in the government, such as Commerce, Treasury, Justice, and so on? Problems created by representatives of different American agencies? I had one, for example, in Bulgaria, where two different narcotics-control officers were trying to negotiate something.

ROSS: I see. I never had narcotics-control officers at any of my posts.

Q: I didn't have but one stationed there.

ROSS: I didn't really have any before I retired. I never, really, as far as Commerce or Agriculture or Treasury were concerned, had any particular problems of that nature. I think once in a while we may have had things that had to be straightened out with respect to aid.

Q: Yes. That can be a very complicated problem.

We are right at the end of the tape. Thank you very much.

ROSS: Thank you for this opportunity.

End of interview